Lutheran Coalition for Renewal
CORE Voice
A Voice and Network for Confessing Lutherans
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May

Congregational Lay Leadership Initiative

by Pr. Dennis D. Nelson, Lutheran CORE Executive Director

We are very grateful for all of the ways in which retired NALC pastor Don Brandt enhances the ministry of Lutheran CORE. He has an article in every issue of our bi-monthly newsletter. In these articles he draws on his decades of ministry experience – both serving as pastor of a congregation and consulting with congregations – as well as his many years of research and writing. We want Lutheran CORE to be a Network for Confessing Lutherans as well as a Voice for Biblical Truth. We want to provide resources for pastors, lay people, church leaders, and congregations in addition to our work of alerting people to ways in which the historic, Biblical, confessional Christian faith is at risk.

For several years Don has been providing a consulting service through the **Congregations in Transition (CiT) ministry initiative**. Through this ministry he has worked with transition teams – both in situations where the pastor has already retired or resigned to take another call as well as in situations where the pastor has not yet left but soon will be leaving. He has also worked with call committees in their search for a new pastor. At this point Pastor Brandt has provided some level of coaching support for twenty-five congregations. Twenty-one of these congregations are LCMC, three are ELCA, and one is dual-rostered.

Pastor Brandt has also written powerfully about a dynamic that church leaders and congregational call committees are only too familiar with - the growing shortage of pastors available for call. This shortage

Continued on page 4

In This Issue:

- How many churches has CiT coached so far?
- In search of mentor/coaches ...
- If I only had a map ...
- *SIMUL* remembers Jim Nestingen
- Latest CORE Convictions video for May
- Video Book Review for May
- Pro Ecclesia conference is just a few weeks away!

Inside this Issue:

Congregational Lay Leadership Initiative…… p. 1
The Clergy Shortage: Some Historical Perspective……p.2
City Mission 2023……..p.3
Web Map……..……p. 3
Video Ministries……..…..p. 5
Coming Events……..…..p. 5
SIMUL Winter 2023……....p. 6
Pro Ecclesia Conference…….....p. 6

The Clergy Shortage: Some Historical Perspective

by Pr. Don Brandt, Congregations in Transition

Perhaps my perspective is somewhat distorted by being one among so many retired or retiring Boomer pastors. After all, the Boomer generation has been accused—often justifiably—of having an inflated view of its own importance.

However, age does sometimes bring a degree of historical perspective. So allow me to share, from my own professional life, how dramatically the Lutheran church has changed, in at least one way, since I graduated from seminary back in 1981. My seminary class was comprised of just over sixty graduates; virtually all of us seeking our first call and ordination. However, at that time there were far more Lutheran seminary graduates in the U.S. than there were available calls. As a result, on graduation day at my seminary there were only three of us who knew where our first call would be. The rest of the class would simply have to wait; in some cases for over a year.

For some additional perspective regarding today's clergy shortage, consider the dramatic differences when it comes to the current seminary experience and what graduates—and call committees—can expect in 2023:

1. The number of Lutheran seminary graduates today who have an M.Div degree is probably less than 25% of the number of graduates back in 1981. And the number of vacant congregations without a pastor has increased dramatically.

2. Unlike in 1981, when the great majority of seminary students were studying full-time and living either on campus or within commuting distance, the majority of seminary students in 2023 are studying almost entirely online. And consider just one implication of this new norm: Online seminary students—logistically—often will not and cannot be adequately vetted by seminary faculty. This means that call committees in 2023 are often looking at applicants that have not, in any meaningful way, been "screened" as to whether they are suitable candidates for call and ordination.

3. Call committees in 2023 are, in some cases, unfortunately "settling" for candidates who might not be suitable for their call. Why? Because of an incredible shortage of qualified applicants for their position.

4. The *shortage* of viable seminary graduates and currently serving pastors available for call has not yet plateaued. Instead, this shortage is only growing more severe. And this *growing* crisis will last at least until the last serving Boomer pastors retire. As of this year Boomers are between the ages of 59 and 77. In other words, it is only in 2029 that the youngest Boomers will reach the age of 65.

5. The pandemic has accelerated the rate at which pastors are leaving full-time ministry. This is due in part to a significant number of pastors who had to deal with pandemic-related congregational conflict.

Also contributing to these resignations is the stress experienced by pastors who have seen a pandemic-related, demoralizing decrease in in-person worship attendance compared to early 2020.

Enough in regard to the challenges the church is facing now and over at least the next six years. What can we do as lay leaders and pastors to address this crisis? To begin with, we need to acknowledge that no single ministry program or strategy will suffice. Why? Because this crisis is too systemic and formidable for a single, simple "fix". However, there are at least two church-wide strengths that, if capitalized on, could make a real difference.

One is the fact that a great many competent and faithful Boomer pastors have retired over the last decade. I am convinced that many of them would be willing to step forward to mentor and coach a single congregation that is dealing with an unfilled vacancy. In some cases this could mean serving in a compensated part-time interim role if the pastor is living within a reasonable distance from the church. In other cases, a retired pastor could volunteer to serve as a mentor and coach—at a distance—to congregational leaders. This would involve coaching online and by phone. In this scenario the pastor would be volunteering his/her time, and would not be relocating or

Continued on page 4

City Mission 2023

by Pr. Dennis D. Nelson, Lutheran CORE Executive Director

Our prayers are with Pastor Craig Moorman and all those who are providing leadership for and participating in **City Mission 2023**, a multi-generational, multi-denominational outreach effort into the inner city of Baltimore organized and hosted by River's Edge Ministries (REM) of Mt. Airy, Maryland. Craig is an NALC/LCMC pastor and also a member of the board of Lutheran CORE.

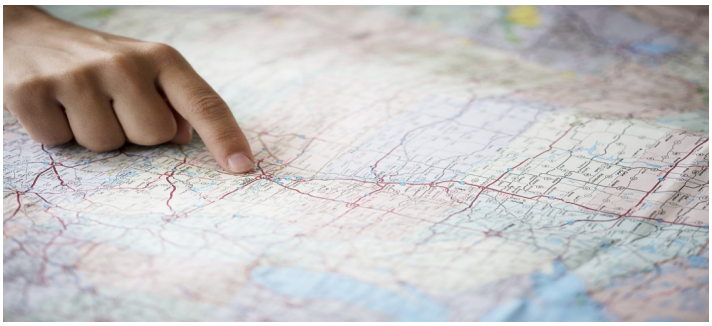
Since 2014 REM has been coordinating these outreach ministries into the inner city. One of the participants has described them as "a raw and unfiltered experience of what it means to be the church." River's Edge describes them as "calling on the Church to be His Church" and giving the people of God an opportunity to live "a Christ-centered life through meaningful worship, community building, and missional outreach."

River's Edge has been coordinating another kind of mission effort - **Cross Country Mission** – since 2005, when a group of followers of Jesus traveled to Biloxi, Mississippi to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Since then Cross Country Mission groups have traveled to various parts of the country to bring relief, help, and encouragement to people whose lives and livelihoods have been battered by hurricanes, floods, and the other storms of life. This past January a group went to Pine Island, Florida to help the victims of Hurricane Ian rebuild their lives. It was a great privilege for Lutheran CORE to be one of the sponsors of this year's Cross Country Mission. Here is a link to the articles in the March issue of CORE Voice, which told about this effort.

The dates for **City Mission 2023** Baltimore and Beyond are May 17-21; service days (excluding set-up) are May 18-20. Please be praying for this effort. Here is a link to a video that will tell you more. For more information you can also go to the website for River's Edge Ministries. We encourage you to gather a group from your church to go next year.

Web Map

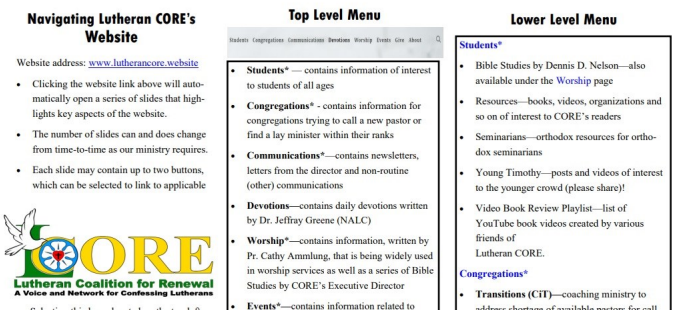
by Pr. Dennis D. Nelson, Lutheran CORE Executive Director



Whenever I fly into an airport I have never been in before, I am always very grateful for all the signs that greet me as soon as I step off the plane. It is because of these signs that I can find the baggage claim area and the rental car counter. And once I have my rental car, because of signs I know how to get out of the airport and on to my destination.

Web sites are great tools for providing information about a ministry and/or other kind of organization. Many thanks to Kim Smith, former president of our board, who continues to serve as web master, editor of our newsletter, and director of all of our various forms of social media.

Kim has developed a document which can serve as a kind of map to our website. We anticipate that this document will be helpful not only for a person who might be looking at our website for the first time, but also for someone who has been on our website many times before but may not be aware of all of the resources that can be found there.



Here is a link to the Web Map. You can also find it in the footer of our website.

Congregational Lay Leadership Initiative

Continued from page 1

is reaching crisis proportions.

He has written convincingly about the need for many congregations – especially smaller and/or more remote congregations – to take seriously the fact that they might not be able to find another ordained pastor to call. Instead they may need to transition to a lay-led ministry model in order for the congregation to be able to continue to exist and do God's work.

But Pastor Brandt is not just someone who will describe a problem. He is also someone who will do something about the problem. And even beyond that, he is someone who will develop a plan so that others also can become involved in doing something about the problem.

Here is a link to the **Congregational Lay Leadership Initiative (CLI)** page on our website. Clicking on the link you will find such resources as a description of the concept, including frequently asked questions, as well as a list of steps that a congregation can take to identify, enlist, and train part-time lay ministers.

We are very grateful for the fact that LCMC and the NALC have a similar concern and are taking positive steps so that all congregations can have trained leaders. It is going to take the best efforts of all of us to address this major concern.

I frequently hear from congregations that are unable to find a pastor to call or that have found a retired pastor who is able and willing to come one or two times a month but then lay members provide worship leadership on the other Sundays. We are very grateful to all retired pastors who are willing to serve – even if not every Sunday and even if serving means traveling a considerable distance. And we thank God for the members of congregations who deeply love their Lord and their church so that they are willing to step up and lead worship and give the message. I know that some people feel that these lay leaders should receive sufficient training so that they would be ordained. But I know of situations where I believe that willing and capable lay leaders would be "scared off" if they knew that they would have to be ordained. Then that congregation might have to close because of a lack of worship leadership.

Please notice that the Congregational Lay Leadership Initiative (CLI) calls upon retired pastors who would be willing to come alongside of these lay ministers, meeting with them online once a month and providing ongoing counsel and support. If you would be willing to consider being one of these mentor/coaches please let us know. We have a document which will tell you more of what would be involved.

The Clergy Shortage ...

Continued from page 2

driving long distances to serve in person. In this post-Covid era there is a new culture-wide acceptance and recognition of the potential for online coaching to make a real difference; both for individuals and organizations. It's no secret: Many pastors, once they retire, welcome an opportunity to serve in some ministry capacity.

Second, many if not most of the congregations dealing with long, extended vacancies already have talented and faithful lay leaders who have a vested interest in wanting their congregations to not only survive but thrive. I am convinced that many of these lay leaders should be recruited, commissioned and trained as part-time lay *ministers* for their congregations. And *some* of these lay ministers need to be encouraged to consider an online seminary education while they serve.

This is where I see real hope and promise in the years ahead: Helping part-time, commissioned lay ministers and retired pastors connect in a meaningful way to serve Christ's church; a church that is definitely *in crisis*.

Lutheran CORE is offering a new ministry to address this crisis: the **Congregational Lay-leadership Initiative**, or CLI. This is by no means the *only* way to address this clergy shortage, but it *is one way.*

To learn more about CLI we now have complete information available on the Lutheran CORE website. Or, email me personally at pastor-donbrandt@gmail.com.

Video Ministries—May 2023

by Pr. Dennis D. Nelson, Lutheran CORE Executive Director

Here is a link to our You Tube channel. In the top row you will find both our Video Book Reviews as well as our CORE Convictions Videos on various topics related to Biblical teaching, Lutheran theology, and Christian living. You will find these videos in the order in which they were posted, beginning with the most recent. In the second row you will find links to the Playlists for both sets of videos. This month we want to feature two videos - a CORE Convictions Video by LCMC pastor Kent Groethe and a Video Book Review by NALC pastor Stephane Kalonji.

AN ANATOMY OF CONVERSION
BY KENT GROETHE

Here is a link to Pastor Groethe's video. He is pastor of an LCMC congregation in Arizona and is former editor of the Connections Magazine.

Many thanks to him for this video in which he shows that the story of Cleopas and a friend on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 is an Anatomy of Conversion. It is a paradigm for how God works saving/justifying faith in a person. Pastor Kent speaks about each part the Spirit, the Word, and the proclaimer has in this encounter.

STRANGERS NEXT DOOR: IMMIGRATION, MIGRATION, AND MISSION
BY STEPHANE KALONJI

Here is a link to Pastor Kalonji's video. He is pastor of an NALC congregation in Texas.

Many thanks to Pastor Kalonji for his video review of this book, which was published by InterVarsity Press in 2012. Strangers Next Door is one of the many books written by J.D. Payne. Throughout this book, the author emphasizes a diaspora missiology. He brings together Holy Scripture and facts about immigration and migration, and challenges Christians to share the gospel with the peoples of the world who have migrated to the West.

Why are the majority world's people migrating to the West? Payne contends that there are three principal reasons: Flight from war, search for higher paying jobs, and study. He notes that many of the migrants coming to the West have not been reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ and are, therefore, a ripe harvest field for gospel outreach. Basing himself on biblical stories of migrations, Payne argues that migration was part of God's salvation plan from the beginning of creation and not an after-thought after the sin of Adam and Eve.

In response to the presence of migrants and immigrants in the West, Payne challenges western Christians to be intentional about reaching out to them with the gospel, beginning with those who are most receptive to it. He argues that if introduced to the gospel, migrants and immigrants can become missionaries to their own people. To accomplish this outreach, Payne proposes a strategy he calls R.E.P.S.: Reach, Equip, Partner, and Send. He concludes that "Global migrations provide a Great Commission opportunity for us and our churches."

Coming Events

- **Pro Ecclesia Conference**—Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, MD. June 5-7 2023. Click here for more information. Click here to register.
- **NEXUS Institute Summer 2023**—Des Moines, IA. July 16-22, 2023. Click here.
- **ELCA Rostered Ministers Gathering**—Phoenix, AZ. July 17-20, 2023. Click here.
- **NALC Lutheran Week 2023**—Oklahoma City, OK. August 7-11, 2023. Click here.
- **LCMC 23rd Annual Gathering & Convention** — St. Charles, MO. October 1-4, 2023. Click here.

More events: http://lutherancore.website/events/future/

Summer 2023 Pro Ecclesia Conference

Pr. Steve Shipman, STS, and Executive Director of The Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology (CCET)

How will we as Christians address the challenges to Christian fellowship after the impact of the pandemic and in the heightened tensions of our political and cultural life?

That is the topic of the annual Pro Ecclesia Conference to be held June 5-7 at Loyola University in Baltimore, featuring a roster of ecumenical speakers under the theme "Life Together: The Communion of the Saints in a Time of Division and Disease."

I invite you to join us for this very timely conference by registering on our website https://www.pro-ecclesia.org/pro-ecclesia-conference-2023. You can also learn more detailed information about our conference there.

Presenters include William Cavanaugh of DePaul University in Chicago, Rev. Chris Currie of St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, Dr. Lydia Dugdale (a medical doctor and professor at Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons), Wesley Hill of Western Theological Seminary in Michigan, Myles Werntz of Abilene Christian University, and Sondra Wheeler of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C.

In addition, your registration includes our annual banquet on Tuesday evening with Dr. Joseph Small, retired as Presbyterian Church USA Director of Theology and Worship, as our banquet speaker.

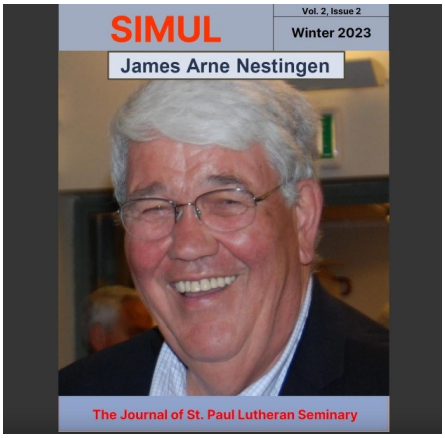
Please contact me if you have any questions, and feel free to share this information widely among your friends and colleagues.

I hope to see you in Baltimore in June.

Steve Shipman
info@pro-ecclesia.org

SIMUL: Winter 2023

by Dennis Di Mauro, NALC pastor and member of the Teaching Faculty at Saint Paul Lutheran Seminary



The Winter 2023 *SIMUL*, the Journal of St. Paul Lutheran Seminary, is out – and best of all, it's free! Click here.

This edition will include remembrances of the life of **Dr. James Arne Nestingen**. Jim was our provost, professor, a director of DMin students, and the teacher of our popular weekly text study. He left some big shoes to fill, and he will be sorely missed.

SIMUL can be read in two ways. One can enlarge and read through the flip book on the top of the webpage (there is a full screen button that can be clicked on the lower right-hand side of the flip-book), *or* one can scroll down and read each individual article. This second option allows readers to share individual articles (that can be read on a cellphone) without sending the entire issue.

In this volume, **John Pless** recalls Jim's emphasis on private confession, **Marney Fritts** plumbs his teaching on repentance, and **Tony D. Ede** explains what it was like to be Jim's student at Luther Seminary. **Steve Paulson** continues our tribute to Jim by exploring his roots in a small Norwegian farming community, **Jonathan Thompson** explains what it was like to be Jim's fellow church member and MDiv student, **Roy Harrisville III** provides a history of Jim's education and early ministry, and **Julie Smith** reveals how Jim used the Small Catechism as the vehicle for his theology. **Randy Freund** finishes out this issue with a review of Jim Nestingen and Gerhard Forde's classic book, *Free to Be*.

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