

**Winter
2015/2016 issue**

(Nov.-Jan.)

the witness

A Publication of the Mid-Northeast Mission District

western New York, western Pennsylvania, West Virginia, western Maryland

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

Doors of Mercy

The Rev. Dr. Alden W. Towberman, Dean

At a recent meeting of Christian Associates in Pittsburgh I was talking with Bishop David Zubik of the Roman Catholic Church. We were talking about God's work taking place in each of our church bodies and he was sharing with me his hopes for his church body in 2016, the Roman Catholic Church of the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

The Bishop was telling me about their vision and focus for 2016, "The Jubilee Year of Mercy," an opportunity for people to find a renewed relationship with God. As a way to open new possibilities in the lives of people in the diocese he said there will be nine churches in Pittsburgh with designated "Holy Doors." At certain times of the year in 2016 people will be invited to walk through these "holy doors" to receive God's mercy and to become a renewed Christian through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our conversation raised the question in my own thoughts about 2016 – what would happen in the Lutheran Church, in our congregations of the NALC and in our personal lives if we knew there was such a door we could walk through into a new chapter of life that would bring us a couple of steps closer to God? ...A door that would really make it possible to leave the past behind and experience a new beginning in life. I expect there would be lines of people miles long to pass through it!

God's Word tells us there is such a door if we have the faith and trust in God to walk through it. "I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:9) The Book of Revelation also speaks about this door: "...Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." (Revelation 3:8)

Walking through this door of mercy comes by restoring

one's radical commitment to the Good News of the Gospel in 2016 and knowing that God is calling us, each and every one, to "turn our lives around." ...Do not bear grudges or harbor resentments as you walk through the door of God's Grace into the New Year. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no." ...There is a price to be paid. Living in grace is about receiving from God and giving to others the gift of mercy. To remove the heavy weight of a troubled conscience walking through this door means knowing that Christ will pay the price so one can leave the past behind. It means recognizing there is also a price we need to pay – giving unconditional mercy to one another. God frees us from a troubled conscience but it is our choice whether to cooperate with God's plan for our life and our church in 2016. The Holy Spirit empowers each of us to build up the Body of Christ in some special manner in 2016 when we walk through the Door of Mercy.

For us Lutheran Christians the means of grace (Word and Sacrament) are the Door of Mercy. When we are absent from the means of grace faith weakens. When we receive the means of grace regularly, faith is strengthened and enlivened, so that "our light will shine before others that they will see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven." May we open and walk through many doors of Christ's Mercy in this New Year.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Alden W. Towberman, Dean

Mid-Northeast Mission District Offices

Office of the Dean

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Administrative Office

(newsletter submissions, benevolence payments, registration and registration payments, etc.)

Mid-Northeast Mission District, NALC

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Please send all check request forms and inquiries to:
The Rev. Nila Cogan, Treasurer
Mid-Northeast Mission District
212 Hilltop Rd., Friedens, PA 15541. (tel: 814-479-2204)

PRAYER REQUESTS

The family of The Rev. Emery Barnett who entered the Church Triumphant in November.

The Rev. Arlyn Eisenbrandt as he continues with cancer treatments. Pastor Eisenbrandt serves at St. Mark's, Adrian, PA.

OUR LEADERSHIP

Dean

The Rev. Dr. Alden W. Towberman
St. Mark's, Butler, PA
atowberman@zoominternet.net

Mission District Council

Pastor Nila Cogan, Treasurer
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Pastor Joyce Dix-Weiers
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Pastor Al Towberman, DEAN
St. Mark's, Butler, PA
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Assistants to the Dean
(June 2015-May 2016)

Pastor Nila Cogan
St. Thomas, Hooversville, PA
(email listed above)

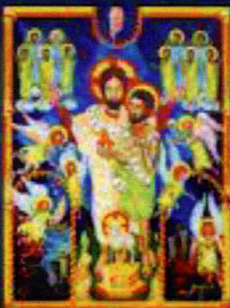
Pastor Carl Johnson
St. John's, Kittanning, PA
(email listed above)

If you're on [Facebook](#), please join us in the Mid-Northeast Mission District group. Can't wait to see you there!



The Confession of St. Peter

Jan 18



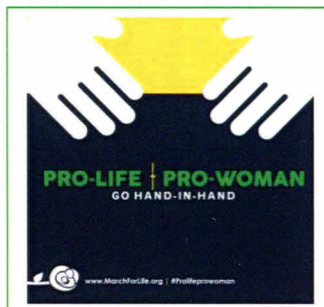
Almighty Father,
who inspired Simon Peter,
first among the apostles,
to confess Jesus as Messiah
and Son of the Living God:
Keep your Church steadfast
upon the rock of this faith,
that in unity and peace
we may proclaim the one truth
and follow the one Lord,
our Savior Jesus Christ.

Please visit our mission district web site at

www.midnemdnalc.org

Please make this web site address available in your congregations: publish in bulletins and newsletters as part of the regular (static) information!

The 43rd annual
MARCH FOR LIFE is
scheduled for Friday,
Jan 22, 2016
Washington, D.C.
We pray for the unborn
and for the women who
are carrying them.



March for Life on Friday, January 22, 2016

National Mall, Washington, D.C.



This January, once again, our Mission District will be taking part in the March for Life in Washington, D.C. The March for Life is the largest Christian Pro-Life Rally in the world. The Nation's Capital will be filled with young people who come from all over the country. We will be joining with people of all ages and denominations, people filled with God's love - close to a million people coming together to worship, gathering at the National Mall in peace and prayer and then marching to the Supreme Court to stand up for "Life."

In The North American Lutheran Church we hold a Biblical view of life ("...Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you..." – Jeremiah 1:4; "For it was You who formed my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." – Psalm 139:13-14). Therefore we believe that life begins at conception.

Therefore, we believe all unborn children are full and distinct persons in the eyes of God. ...Every person is a gift from God, the One, who forms us in our mother's womb. Every soul, every person is precious to God and their dignity and worth is to be respected.

The March for Life in January is a peaceful demonstration to up-lift the dignity of women as well as the unborn. Motherhood is a holy calling even in difficult circumstances as witnessed in the life of Mary, Jesus' mother. Unborn children are not "the property" of those who have conceived – each person's life, every soul belongs to God. The rights of the unborn and the dignity of women compels us to be a church and a society that "chooses life" and to seek the reversal of Rowe vs. Wade. We are Pro-Life and Pro-Women.

Since 1973 and the United States Supreme Court's decision to legalize abortion, more than 56 million children have been aborted in the United States, with 1.2 million abortions performed in just the last year. Statistics tell us that over 95 percent of those abortions were performed on children with no suspected fetal abnormalities.

Members of our congregations are invited to join our Bishop, Deans, and the NALC Executive Council, in this year's March. **An Ecumenical Worship Service begins the day at Constitution Hall 8:30 - 10:30 am. If you arrive after 10:30 - gather under the North American Lutheran Church banner outside the Smithsonian on the National Mall.** Following speeches/prayers on the mall we will march together united as one in the Body of Christ up Independence Avenue to the Supreme Court. The day's events conclude around 3:30 pm.

We need to express our faith publically. If possible all our congregations are encouraged to send a delegation or representatives. Please hold this year's March for Life in prayer at weekend services on, January 16-17, 2016 – and in personal prayer on January 22nd.

Around the Mission District....

Dean's Notes

+Our continued prayers this Holy Season for the family of Pastor Emery Barnett who joined the Church Triumph, November 16, 2015.

+I want to Thank All of our Congregations and Pastors for your financial support in 2015 as we look forward in our Mission District to continuing our shared work in the Gospel together in 2016.

+Congratulations and thanks to God for Pastor Sam Scheiderer who is retiring, December 31, 2015, after 28 years of ministry at the New Stanton – Arona Parish of our Mission District.

+If you have not already done so please submit your profile information and clergy pictures for our soon to be published 2016 Mission District Directory to Rebecka Andrae

+ Pastor Chip Frontz has been appointed to represent the North American Lutheran and our Mission District Church on the Theological Task Force of Christian Associates.

+All of our congregations are asked to support and encourage their pastors to attend the 2016 NALC Pastors Conference, February 2-4 in Orlando, Florida. "The Lord and His Church and Ministry" is the conference theme. Presenters include: Dr. David Yeago, Dr. James Nestingen, and Dr. Amy Schiffrin. Registration is \$100 and a discounted hotel rate is available for reservations made by January 1, 2016.

+ At the December meeting of Christian Associates a joint theological and social action statement was approved regarding the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and Europe. The work that we strive to do together as bishops and judicatory leaders of the 29 church bodies that are part of Christian Associates enables us to speak to our culture embracing Gospel values rooted in the unconditional love of Christ. Discipleship as you know is a core value of our church body, the NALC. Accordingly much attention is given to the Great Commission. Social doctrine and our ecclesial response is part of our Christian discipleship as we carry out the work of Christ in the world as we strive to fulfill Christ's will and mission in society. The value of holiness and generous service to ones neighbor must always be held in balance so that both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment define us as a church community.

+At the December meeting of Christian Associates it was good to see and visit with the former Bishop of the Southwest Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA who has moved back to Pittsburgh the end of August. Bishop Don McCoid, now retired, and a dear friend too many of us in the NALC will be meeting as a proxy member of Christian Associates.

Commissioning of
The Rev. Mack Smith
as Mission Developer
at Christ Lutheran Church
East Amherst, NY.

On the crisp and clear Sunday morning of Oct. 4, 2015, God's faithful people gathered with joy to celebrate the commissioning of The Rev. Mack Smith as Mission Developer at Christ Lutheran Church in East Amherst, NY.

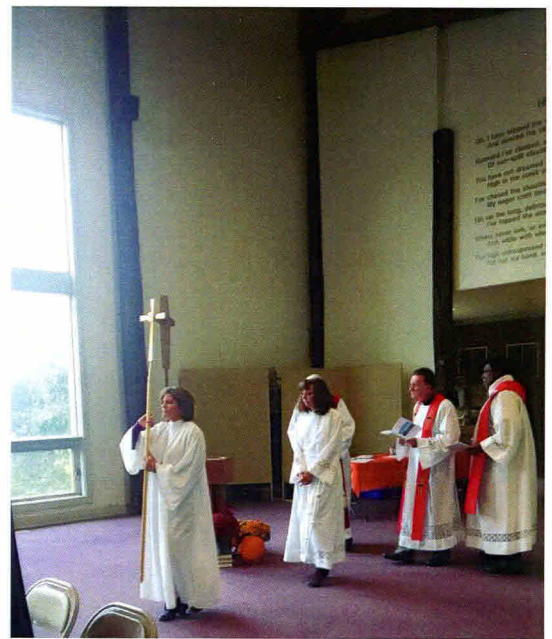
One by one, people arrived at Christ's beautiful worship space at the Buffalo Niagara Heritage Village Museum. Smiles, greetings, and conversation abounded as joyful expectancy filled the air at this mission start.

The Rev. Fred Schumacher, retired and former Executive Director of the American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and Pr. Smith's mentor since his formative ministry years, preached on Mark 10:2-16 and lifted up private Confession and Absolution as essential to the Christian life.

Pastors Lubas and Griep (pictured at right), along with Pastor Mertzluft (not pictured), served as Shepherding Pastors at Christ since its founding 4 years ago. As there were no NALC pastors in the area, these faithful and orthodox ELCA pastors served this mission fellowship by supporting its ministry and confession. Their guidance was honored during the worship service.



*Additional information
provided by Mr. Jim
Scott, Deacon at Christ,
East Amherst, NY.*



Left to right: Patty Braunscheidel (seminarian at NALS) is the crucifer, Debbie Pretorius is the Deaconess, Rev. Michael Lubas (ELCA, retired), and Rev. Mack Smith.



Left to right: Rev. Daniel Hoffman, STS (ELCA, Trinity Lutheran Church, East Amherst), Rev. Michael Lubas (ELCA, retired), Rev. Fred Schumacher, STS (ELCA, retired), Rev. Allen Griep (ELCA, retired), Rev. Mack Smith, Rebecka Andrae (Administrative Assistant for the mission district and representing the Dean), and Juhree Polkowski (then mission district council member).

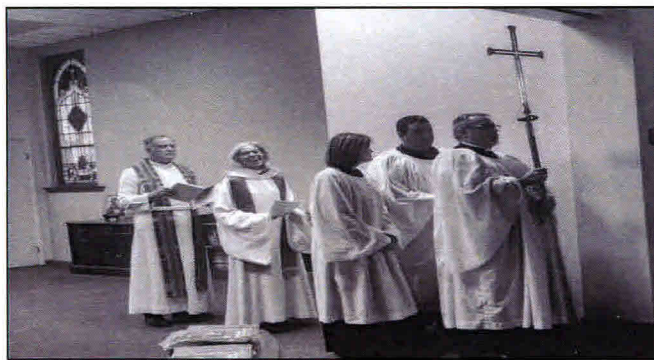


ANNUAL CONVOCATION AND SEMINARY OPEN HOUSE – OCT. 24, 2015

NORTH AMERICAN LUTHERAN SEMINARY, AMBRIDGE, PA

Brief Report

Our Mid-Northeast Mission District met at the North American Lutheran Seminary for its annual convocation Oct. 24, 2015. The day included a presentation on liturgy and life by The Rev. Dr. Amy Schiffrin, our seminary president, and an update on our denomination from The Rev. March Chavez, General Secretary of the North American Lutheran Church. A budget was passed for 2016, ordination anniversaries were honored, ministry display tables were available with information, updates and information were received regarding mission district youth and mission district women, and tours of the seminary following fellowship lunch. Mr. Douglas Vogel of Dunmyer in Johnstown, PA was elected to a lay position on the mission district council and The Rev. Carl Johnson of St. John's in Kittanning, PA was re-elected to a clergy position. Our day together closed with festival worship led by The Rev. Dr. Alden Towberman, Dean of our mission district.



CALENDAR & ANNOUNCEMENTS

EVENT	DATE	TIME	LOCATION	CONTACT(S)
2016 March For Life	January 22, 2016		Washington, D.C.	Rebecka Andrae 724-787-7780 For bus information
Youth Quake Zone (And mission district tremor)	January 29-31, 2016	Begins with Tremor at 6 p.m.	Monroeville, PA	Pr. Nila Cogan 814-479-2204 Incogan@comcast.net
Women's One-Day Retreat	February 13, 2016	9 a.m.	Christ Shelocta, PA	Karen George 724-961-3046
Mission District Council meeting	February 18, 2016	10 a.m.	Brighton Heights Pittsburgh, PA	Dean Towberman 724-698-3644
Bible Bowl	April 9, 2016	1 p.m.	First Washington, PA	Pastor Mark Werner revmaw@wpa.net Pastor Nila Cogan Incogan@comcast.net

YOUTH ACTIVITIES !

Quake Zone is at the end of the month. Again this year the mission district will have a room where we can gather and get to know each other (when there is free time from Quake Zone). The room will be open at 5:30 on Friday afternoon and at 6:00 we will have a "Tremor" before Quake Zone begins. Pizza will be available at that time and a chance to get acquainted with each other. We can all go to Quake Zone together as the youth from the NALC.

Bible Bowl will be on Saturday, April 9, at First Lutheran in Washington, Pa (registration forms and rules can be found as inserts inside this issue).

Plan on attending the mission trip to Nile Lutheran in Rochester, NY - July 8-12 and YOUTH CAMP July 26-28 in Hooversville, PA

Direct questions to Pastor Nila Cogan by emailing Incogan@comcast.net or by calling/texting 814-483-0296

NOVEMBER ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES

The Rev. Troy Mulvaine '03 (12 years). *Pr. Schoch serves at Church of the Apostles, North Tonawanda, NY.*

The Rev. Dr. Daniel Grimminger '12 (3 years). *Pr. Grimminger serves at Holy Trinity, Grove City, PA.*

Recognition of commissioning of lay minister:

Mr. Dennis Hindman '99 ELCA {authorized '14 NALC} (17 years). *Mr. Hindman serves in place of a pastor (by our bishop's authority) at Pleasant Union, Kittanning, PA.*

DECEMBER ORDINATION ANNIVERSARY

The Rev. Dr. John Harmon '76 (39 years). *Pr. Harmon is a retired pastor of our mission district.*

finalthoughts...

Any announcements should be sent to:

Rebecka Andrae, Administrative Assistant

rebeckaandrae@yahoo.com DEADLINE: 21st of each month

PASTORS and Councils:

Please share this newsletter with your congregations. Include announcements in bulletins and post on bulletin board.

ADDITIONAL FALL CONVOCATION PHOTOS



MID-NORTHEAST MISSION DISTRICT

Administrative Office

131 Starboard Villa Ln. #315

Greensburg, PA 15601

www.midnemdnalc.org



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



The Confession of St. Peter