

A MESSAGE FROM OUR DEAN

*The Rev. David McGettigan
Dean, The Atlantic Mission District*

“Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you. ‘I go away, and I come to you’.
— John 14:27b-28a

In these verses Jesus is preparing his disciples for his return to the Father, and for their presence as the body of Christ on earth, the Church, where the disciples will continue to bring his good news to all. One post-Easter reading in the *Liturgy of the Hours* was an excerpt of a sermon from a 14th century German Dominican, Johannes Tauler reflecting on John 14:18-31, a portion states:

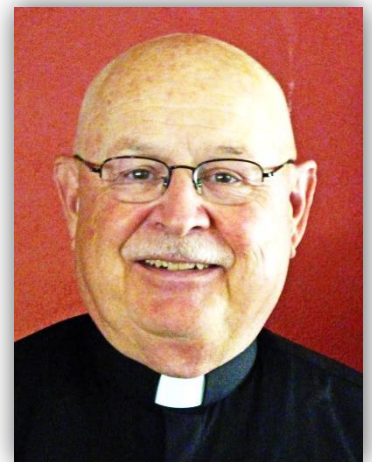
“Many people would gladly be God’s witnesses when everything goes according to their wishes. They like to be holy, as long as their devotions are not too much of a burden: they would be happy enough to experience great fervor and profess their faith openly, if only there were no distress, no grief, no drudgery involved”.

14th century? Sounds like 21st century to me. Perhaps the greatest impediment to our sharing our faith personally with another, telling the story of Jesus especially our own walk with Jesus is fear, distress, anxiety at being rejected, or being a pest, or where to start, or that we’ll just say the wrong thing! It’s just plain uncomfortable for so many of us in a world that prizes and pushes us toward comfort at all costs.

I am amazed at the levels of hyperbole and sensuous images advertisers have risen just to entice me to a particular pillow or mattress. Why? My comfort -- luxury of almost hedonistic proportions. Comfort is what we are about. We are drawn daily in the most subtle and

intoxicating ways toward ultimate comfort in the products we use, the experiences we choose, even the people with whom we associate.

Then, there is Jesus and the Gospel who call us out of our comfort zones where we are nestled more and more deeply into self, and into the largely unknown world where we are to serve, first by bringing a word of hope and light in darkness – not a comforting prospect because the “world” may not be turning a willing ear despite its innate hungering and thirsting.



The Easter season is our hope. The resurrection is the assurance that our true comfort is always on the far side of the discomfort of the passion. Jesus’ constant word of peace in post-resurrection appearances to a frightened and confused community of shaken disciples is the word of grace that their fear, while real, is misplaced. He is with them and in his power they – we – are able to speak his word to another perhaps trembling and even unsure but effective in the Holy Spirit’s presence with us. Our true comfort is always just the other side of facing our discomfort but never alone.

continued

In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus assures his disciples that even were we to be dragged before the authorities and officially charged for the name of Jesus, we are not alone and the words are not ours. *“When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”* (Matthew 10:19-20)

All the more speaking a gentle word and the consoling story of our walk with Jesus to a soul in trouble, we are guided by the presence of God’s Holy Spirit. It is still not comfortable, indeed. It

is difficult at least in the beginning until we have tried it and found true spiritual comfort on the other side of our initial discomfort. The key is deepening our personal prayer life with Jesus, a kind of comfort zone of its own.

In Philippians 4 Paul reminds us that the Lord is always close by and thus we should avoid anxiety, *“...but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”*. The peace and comfort of Jesus alive and present be with you.

CONFERENCE ON THE SANCTITY OF LIFE AND MARCH FOR LIFE HIGHLIGHTS

The 2018 NALC Life Conference was held Thursday, January 18, 2018 at Annapolis Evangelical Church, an AMD District congregation in Edgewater, MD.

The theme of the conference and the 2018 March for Life was *“Love Saves Lives.”* It addressed how you can answer God’s call to protect human life from conception to natural death.

The conference included three pro-life speakers and concluded with worship led by Bishop Bradosky. Speakers and their topics included:

- ***The Joys of Mary*** – From Luke 1 by Pr. Melinda Jones of Advent Lutheran Church, North Charleston, S.C.
- ***Biblical Aging*** – by Pr. Brad Hales of Reformation Lutheran Church, Culpeper, VA.
- ***From Atheism to a Witness for Life*** – The inspiring story of Mary Ann by Dr. Robert Benne of Roanoke, VA.

The conference organizer was Pr. Dennis Di Mauro.

The following day participants, including a number of AMD members, took part in the Memorial for the Preborn service in Washington D.C., and joined thousands of others for the March for Life from the Washington Monument to the U.S. Supreme Court building.



ABORTION: MORAL AND LEGAL REFLECTIONS

By Dr. Robert D. Benne

Jordan Trexler Professor Emeritus, Research Associate, Religion and Philosophy

*While written during the Clinton administration and before the NALC was chartered,
this article continues to be highly relevant...*



Last week two events that mattered to me happened on the same day. President Clinton again vetoed the "partial-birth abortion" legislation brought to him by a large majority of the

Senate. But the Senate fell several votes short of overriding the President's veto and that procedure still remains legal, in spite of the American Medical Association's formal pronouncement that it is unnecessary.

On the very evening of that veto we attended the annual fundraiser of the Crisis Pregnancy Center of the Roanoke Valley. That event is one of the largest fundraisers in the Valley but is rarely covered by any of the media. It's not an "in" event with the Valley elite, who much prefer the "chef's delight" fundraiser sponsored by Planned Parenthood. Nevertheless, it elicits much loyalty from the huge evangelical and fundamentalist communities here. Some mainstream Protestants and a larger number of Catholics also lend their support. I support the organization enthusiastically because of the wisdom implicit in the injunction offered by many parties in the controversy over abortion: "If you discourage women from having abortions, you'd better be willing to support them when they decide 'for life.'"

So I found myself both pained and exhilarated on the same day on this controverted issue. At an earlier time in my life I wouldn't have had such

contrary feelings. Nor would I have been as reluctant to write about the subject as I am now; I was pretty sure that the expansion of abortion rights was a good thing. Like many others of my generation, the Supreme Court decision in 1973 seemed to be an important step forward for women and men alike. It allowed safe and legal abortions for those who carefully considered such a momentous decision. The Lutheran church to which I belonged (The Lutheran Church in America) endorsed the decision, which lent even more credence to my initial opinion.

But like my church, I began to feel queasy about the whole matter. I can remember seeing page after page of advertisements in the Yellow Pages of the Chicago telephone directory for abortion services. The floodgates seemed to open wide and many, many developing lives were ended. About the same time, a principled movement to limit abortion rights emerged to challenge the changes effected by the Roe vs. Wade decision. What many people thought would be an end to the matter was only the beginning. My church reconsidered its almost unqualified support. And I began a journey to "the other side."

That journey was accelerated by some intense personal experiences. In the spring of 1977 my wife, Joanna, told me that she thought she was pregnant. We were both forty and by now had three children, the youngest already nine years old. We had lived our 18 years of married life on one salary and were getting tired of running out of money ten days before the month ended. Joanna was planning to enter the work force again to supplement the modest salary of a seminary professor. We were

psychologically settled into the expectation that our child-bearing days were over. Moreover, we had a sabbatical coming up, which we planned to take in Cambridge, England. Going there with three kids seemed enough of a challenge without an infant on our hands.

So the suspicion of another pregnancy came as a real downer. (Indeed, the Sondheim song "Send in the Clowns" will always have somber connotations for me that go beyond the text and music itself.) But we needed to make sure. So Joanna went to the Pregnancy Testing Center that was located in our church. I was on the church council and had been led to believe that the center simply provided accurate testing and did not encourage its clients in any specific direction. But when Joanna got a positive test the staff of the center handed her a list of abortion providers. They were shocked when she told them she didn't want the list. But we were equally shocked that such a blithe endorsement of abortion was going on in our church!

After we were certain about the pregnancy I felt trapped. I simply wasn't prepared to raise a fourth child! My mind flitted to that list of providers. Wouldn't that solve things quickly? I was saved from actually entertaining that idea by the steadfastness of my wife, who is the real hero of the story. She resolutely, firmly, and deliberately accepted the invitation to be a mother again, though she was just as settled as I in the notion that we were done with bearing children. I often hope and pray that I wouldn't seriously have contemplated an abortion, that I would have finally been as strongly for the new life as was my wife. But I'll never know for sure.

But I am so grateful for the steadfast Christian hospitality of my wife, who was willing to accept the most vulnerable of strangers. She carried me along. And we are delighted to have a twenty-five year old son who is making his way in life.

Her steadfast commitment to new life has led me over the years to listen with careful attention to the arguments of the "pro-life" movement, which I believe are slowly winning the day both morally and legally. They certainly won the day with me.

Here are some of them. First, human life certainly does begin at conception. It may not be fully developed, but neither are babies. The fetus, if allowed to develop, will indeed become a baby and then a person. Everything is there from the beginning. It just needs to be protected and nurtured. The unborn child's claims to life increase as it develops and become near inviolable at viability, which is increasingly pushed back to earlier and earlier stages. While abortion at the very early stages of pregnancy may not be murder, it certainly is killing. And even if the fetus' claim to life is not absolute at the early stages of pregnancy, it is profoundly serious. Christian hospitality to "the stranger" should lead Christians to participate in abortion in only the rarest and most compelling cases.

Second, such weighty respect for developing life is not dependent on the wishes or desires of the mother or the father or both. That life has intrinsic value of its own that must be recognized and respected; its value is objective rather than subjective. While it is definitely true that "every child should be wanted," the child's life should not depend on whether it is wanted or not. My second son works for a private mental health agency that deals with profoundly handicapped persons. Many of them are not "wanted" by anyone else. Yet, we have enough moral fiber as a society to bestow worth and care upon them whether or not they are wanted. They are persons created in the image of God and neither their handicaps--nor the fact they are not "wanted"--can efface that.

Third, we ought to recognize that objective worth by encouraging women to bring their babies to term, by supporting them at birthing time and by offering the possibility of adoption of the child to

the hundreds of thousands of persons wanting to adopt babies. Crisis Pregnancy Centers around the country try to do just that. That's why I find them so compelling.

Fourth, freedom alone does not a moral decision make. Freedom is necessary for a moral decision, but it is not sufficient. The claims of other lives have to be taken into account. The American assumption that simply because a choice is freely made it is moral is faulty ethical thinking. The point is to make the right, the good, or the virtuous choice. And that includes due consideration of other moral claims upon oneself.

Finally, even the Roe vs. Wade decision recognizes that the state can have a compelling obligation to protect developing life as it nears birth. Our freedoms can justly be limited to prevent harm to others, even to life that is not yet born. Courts are increasingly recognizing that harm to the unborn by outside parties is harm to a person.

Now, with all that said, I know there are good reasons for allowing a measure of moral and legal freedom for balancing competing claims in the early months of pregnancy, as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Social Statement argues. But Christians also ought to presume

strongly for life, again as that statement argues, and for the reasons I have stated above. I can only believe and hope that abortion should be exceedingly rare among them.

Legal remedies are another matter. I think it is important legally to limit abortions by banning the "partial-birth" procedure, by drastically limiting abortion after viability and by continuing to insist on parental notification laws. As for the early months, I would hope that everyone seeking abortions would have to justify such a serious act, much as is required in many European countries. Though permission might well be pro forma, such a requirement would underline the gravity of the action.

But abortion in this more limited sense would have to be kept legal and accessible....but not too accessible. In the long run I would hope that the moral landscape would change. Sex would once again be firmly connected with public commitment, family planning strategies (perhaps even of the natural kind) would be made more healthful and effective, dishonor would once again fall upon a man who got a woman pregnant outside the promise of marriage, and that the whole society would be more welcoming to and supportive of life, not only to the unborn but also to the born.

A SPIRIT-LED NEW LIFE

*By Rev. Brett Jenkins
Pastor, Holy Cross Lutheran Church, Nazareth, PA*

Is it ever appropriate to celebrate the end of a cherished dream? How do you know when it is time to embrace something new?

I confess, I am not good at letting go of things I love. In the boxes of stuff I have yet to unpack in my new house is a set of Dungeons and Dragons figures I saved from D&D playing days back in middle school (yes, *Stranger Things* viewers, some

of us were actually there in 1982); I have been saving them to make a chess set out of them rather than listing them on eBay—I like to call it “repurposing,” not stubbornness.

Therefore, I confess that it was with great temerity—even active resistance—that I approached the end of Abundant Life Lutheran Church, the mission congregation of the NALC

in the Poconos that called me only two years ago to be its pastor. Because growth was slower than originally hoped-for, I could see that my time with the congregation was limited, but still, I hoped to get updates from wherever God led me next that they were growing and doing great. I hoped to come back from some distant call to celebrate with the people I loved (my in-laws among them) the opening of their church building and tenth, twentieth, and maybe even thirtieth anniversaries of the congregation.

God had another plan.

Through some unlikely circumstances, we began to interact with the LCMC congregation of Holy Cross a few miles to the south of us. I began serving them part-time to give their Deacon a break while they sought full time pastoral leadership. Through a series of providential events, a conversation began that resulted in Holy Cross joining the NALC and reaching out to Abundant Life to ask them to merge the two ministries.

The advantages were obvious; there was enough commonality to make for a good match and enough diversity to make for stronger, more vibrant ministry if we could receive one another's gifts as just that—gifts from God to one another. Under the wise guidance of Dean McGettigan and Pr. Mark Chavez, the NALC General Secretary, who advised us to be territorial about nothing, we were able to do just that, and on October 31, 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the two congregations celebrated their first worship service together.

Speaking for myself, it was hard to give up the dream of Abundant Life; a lot of work went into praying, seeking God's guidance, visioning, planning, and executing its ministries for the few short months it existed. Our time together was filled with movements of the Spirit, and we did

much more than a congregation our size who met at an inconvenient time in somebody else's building should have been able to do. God's grace was evident everywhere in our midst.

Which is precisely why I should have known we had nothing to fear in the Spirit-led merger of the congregations. God was still leading. Abundant Life had begun with people seeking the Lord's healing and leading. Holy Cross was praying "Thy will be done" at every level of its life as it sought the same thing. In making our two church families into one, Christ was answering all of our prayers in the most unexpected of ways.

And as always, His plan was better than ours. The coming together of our church families has opened new vistas for worship, service, and outreach in Northeast Pennsylvania for orthodox, confessional Lutheranism. New friendships have been formed, and we can all feel the increased vitality on Sunday mornings and throughout the week. There is even buzz in the local community about "the good things" they are hearing about Holy Cross, and we are seeing the opportunity to spread the good news of Jesus Christ in fresh ways to the northern tier of our state... and all because we were all willing to open ourselves to the new, unexpected thing God was doing as He answered all of our fervent prayers.

Is the Lord trying to answer your prayers in a way you are resisting? Is the Lord offering us as the NALC answers to our prayers that we don't understand or expect, and so are having trouble receiving with open hands and hearts? Perhaps we all need a fresh openness to the unexpected moves of the God revealed by our Lord Jesus Christ, whose truths are unchanging and whose movements are ever-new.

I and my whole family feel incredibly blessed to be part of what God is doing here in our new, "blended family" at Holy Cross. May we

magnify His name, proclaim His victory, and call many to faith for the sake of His kingdom purposes! Amen... and alleluia!



NOT YOUR GRANDMA'S BIBLE STUDY, OR MAYBE IT IS!

*Submitted by the Bible Journaling Group
Annapolis Evangelical Lutheran Church, Edgewater, MD*

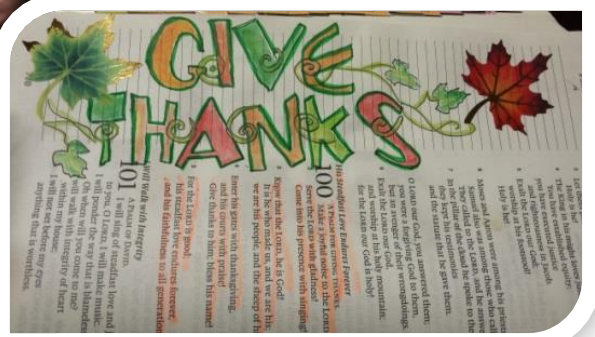
Remember grandma who could recite Bible verses at the drop of a hat? Do you find yourself reading a morning devotion without focusing on the Word? *Bible Journaling* is a fun, creative, exciting way to get “up-close and personal” with God’s Word. Starting a *Bible Journaling* group was the perfect way for our congregation to engage with Scripture and to fellowship at the same time.

It is easy to get started. Anyone interested can find journaling bibles for sale on-line or at stores like Barnes and Noble. These bibles have a lined column on each page. They are available in large print and regular print. We keep a few journaling bibles on hand so that first-timers can try it out

without having to purchase their own. Members of the group bring colored pencils and pens, watercolors, stickers, pictures, tape and press-on letters. Whether you are an artist, a wannabe artist, or a never-to-be artist, everyone can journal. Many members of our group find stencils on *Pinterest* and other online sites that are free and can be easily traced and then embellished. The artists in our group create beautiful original drawings. And, some members in our group just write personal reflections and memories related to a Scripture verse.

At Annapolis Lutheran, we began by meeting one evening a month for an hour and a half. We have

recently expanded to twice a month because the group is having so much fun together. There are several different ways to organize a bible journaling session. Some groups preselect a bible verse and the entire group focuses on that one verse for the entire meeting. At Annapolis Lutheran, each member of our group selects a bible verse that has a special meaning for them. It can be a favorite verse, something from a recent reading, hymn or sermon, or something triggered by a recent event. We open our meeting with prayer and then each member meditates on their chosen verse, creates a journal entry, listens to music, bursts out in song occasionally, laughs and shares stories. *Bible Journaling* has brought a richness into our congregation's study of Scripture, we pray it does the same for you.



NIGHT TO SHINE... FROM A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE A SPECIAL VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

Submitted by Judi Reeder, Member – AMD Mission Team

It's Final Jeopardy and the category is *Things In Common*. The answer is: *Tim Tebow, Valentine's Day, People with Disabilities and a Prom*.

Contestants may have no idea what the question is, but if you attend Reformation Lutheran

Church in Lancaster, PA and have volunteered at the **Annual Night to Shine** celebration at a local church, you get the answer correct.

Yes, fellow Lutherans, there is a terrific opportunity to spend an evening with people in

your area who have special needs. The *Tim Tebow Foundation* is committed to persons with special needs. One of the foundations offerings is helping local congregations organize a *prom night experience centered on God's love*, for people with special needs ages 14 and older. The "Night to Shine" prom is held each year the Friday evening before Valentine's Day.

Volunteer opportunities vary from being a buddy to helping with food for guests or their families, managing a limousine ride for the guests, guest registration, coat-check, being part of a paparazzi team or gift takeaway team, plus other activities depending on the location.

The registration process starts in November, and runs through December. Guests may attend each year including their one-on-one caregiver if applicable. Whatever your gift or talent is, there is a volunteer position for you.

Local eateries, especially Chic-Fil-A, provided food and other volunteers served guests dinner, took formal pictures including their friends, managed the dance room with a disc jockey from a local Christian radio station, ran the karaoke machine for those who wanted to show off their talent, or served in one of the game rooms or the sensory room (complete with a therapy dog).

Reformation Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA participated in February with 6 congregational members volunteering. They served as buddies, assisting in the respite room and with coat-check. Our pastor and his wife and daughter were buddies to two young roommates from a local group home. My son-in-law was stationed at the shoe shine station, and my daughter was in the guest food area specializing in the dessert tray.

On prom night excited guests were greeted by liveried men, and promenaded down a red carpet. They were surrounded by a high school cheerleading team, given flowers upon entry then welcomed by mascots from both our Lancaster baseball team and Chick-Fil-A.

At night's end the prom attendees received their Tim Tebow gift backpacks filled with goodies and their own special "prom" photographs. This

event brings tremendous joy with TLC and a very special treat to those with special needs, as well as their care-takers and families.

Below I've listed organizations in our Mission District that participated in a *Night to Shine* in 2018. I encourage you to explore the possibility of volunteering in a *Night to Shine* - 2019 near you.

Connecticut

Colonial Point Christian Church, South Windsor
 Faith Church, New Milford
 Grace Community Church, New Canaan
 Hope Church, East Hampton

Delaware

Church of Christ, Ocean View
 Reach Church, Bear

Maine

Eastpoint Christian Church, Portland

Maryland

Cresthill Baptist Church, Bowie
 Emmanuel Church, Huntingtown
 Faith Baptist Church, Glen Burnie
 First Baptist Church of Glenarden, Landover
 First Baptist Church of Waldorf, Waldorf
 Holy Family Church, Mitchelville
 Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, Bel Air
 St. Christopher's Catholic Church, Chester
 Trinity Life, Lutherville

Massachusetts

Calvary Baptist Church, Hanson
 Gateway Christian Center, Cotuit
 Grace Church, Avon
 Life Point Church, Chicopee
 North Shore Community Baptist Church, Beverly
 Valley Chapel, Uxbridge

New Hampshire

Granite United Church, Salem

New Jersey

Bayside Chapel, Barnegat
 Calvary Chapel of Gloucester County, Turnersville
 Cherry Hill Chinese Christian Church, Cherry Hill
 Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
 Hackettstown
 Church of the Good Shepherd Cherry Hill, Cherry Hill
 Crossbridge Community Church, Swedesboro
 Liquid Church, Parsippany
 St. Ann Melkite Catholic Church, Woodland Park
 St. Catherine of Bologna, Ringwood
 St. George Syro Malabar Catholic Church, Paterson
 The Chapel, Lincoln Park

New York

Beacon Church, East Williston
 Calvary Chapel, Staten Island
 Grace Community Church, Warwick
 Saint Malachy's, The Actors' Chapel, New York City
 The Bridge Church, Malverne

continued

Pennsylvania

Antrim BIC Church, Chambersburg
 Community Baptist Church, Montoursville
 Epic Church, Bala Cynwyd
 Freedom Life Church, Christiana
 Friendship Community Church, Dover
 Gateway Community Church, Media
 Grace Baptist Church, Lancaster
 Hope Community Church, King of Prussia
 Innovation Church, Chambersburg
 Morning Star Fellowship, Bechtelsville
 Morningstar Fellowship of Quakertown
 Parker Hill Church, Scranton
 Parker Hill Church, Wilkes Barre
 Ridgeline Community Church, Souderton
 Riverbend Community Church, Allentown
 Vibrant, A Christian Church, Mechanicsburg
 Willowdale Chapel, Kennett Square

Rhode Island

OceanPointe Christian Church, Middletown

Vermont

Essex Alliance Church, Essex Junction
 North Pownal Congregational Church, North Pownal



*Above: Cheerleaders preparing
for the big welcome.
Right: Joelle Ketchum,
Event Coordinator.*



“DISCIPLEGETICS”

By Scott Miller, Member Atlantic Mission District Council

Let me start by declaring that nothing trumps the Holy Spirit working in a person through the Word. I firmly believe, as Luther states in his explanation of the Third Article of The Creed, that “the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel...”

In this article I’ll be using the “A” word...yes, that’s right, apologetics. I’m sure some are already cringing. But, this isn’t strictly about apologetics. I wish to explain why integrating it into my discipleship and evangelism efforts is essential. Those efforts have morphed over the last decade. I’ve learned two key things in that time. One is that you can’t argue someone into faith. Those arguments get messy and life’s messy enough as it is. The other is that my observations have shown that many people have problems with discipleship and evangelism because they are afraid of the secular culture that surrounds them. To quote John Warwick Montgomery, “ours is an age where the classical Christian values of our civilization are no longer

dominant.” Many Christians cannot engage in a meaningful, useful discussion about, or make an adequate defense for, their faith; not to mention being unable to provide an adequate explanation of or defense of the Lutheran confessions (which would take more space than allowed here). Let’s be crystal clear...Christianity is under incessant and vehemently vicious attack and venturing into such an environment ill-equipped and unprepared is analogous to bringing a knife to a gun fight.

The approach of “The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it!” may have worked well for previous generations but it doesn’t cut it in the 21st century. That statement by itself provides no defense, or reason, for one’s faith. Critical and Socratic thinking skills, previously reserved for university, are now being taught in middle school. People today are taught to question everything and when that applies to the truth claims of Christianity and the Christian worldview many lack the ability to provide adequate answers or reasons.

continued

There is a website:

<http://coldcasechristianity.com/2018/are-young-people-really-leaving-christianity/> that provides a list of multiple studies that examined why people are either leaving or rejecting the Christian church. The results are disturbing and alarming. In short, it's due to the failure of the church and, more precisely, the people in it, to adequately answer questions that challenge the foundation, faith, and beliefs on which the Christian church stands. Unfortunately, there is a whole culture of unbelievers who are willing to fill that gap. We must be able to keep up with the challenges of today in light of the non-stop anti-Christian pounding that is so prevalent. People have problems as to the truth of Christianity and evidence needs to be presented relative to this. It must be noted that the apostles consistently marshalled evidence for the truth of the Christian claim when engaging unbelievers.

It's not about telling people they're wrong. It's about providing solid reasons for why you believe what you believe, and making a case for the truth of Christian faith.

Montgomery emphasizes that "The fundamental thrust of apologetics is to get past the intellectual obstacles and push the unbeliever to the cross." It's not about telling people they're wrong. It's about providing solid reasons for why you believe what you believe, and making a case for the truth of Christian faith.

William Lane Craig in his book *On Guard* stresses three reasons for the importance of Christians being trained in apologetics: shaping culture, strengthening believers, and winning unbelievers. In a stinging analysis he further states, "In many respects, the church is really failing its children and adults. Rather than provide training in the defense of Christianity's truth, we focus on emotional worship experiences, felt needs, and entertainment." This problem has been wrapped into a dynamic that plagues churches today called

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Montgomery, in his paper *Apologetics for the 21st Century*, emphatically states that "Our discipleship and apologetics begin where the unbeliever is, becoming all things to all people. That does not mean we alter the eternal message to fit the unbeliever's situation or needs, but that our methods of communicating the Gospel will be developed according to the personal, social, and cultural context that never remain constant."

To be sure, our discipleship and apologetic efforts must ultimately be Christocentric and have a tenacious and unflinching focus on the cross. Alvin Schmidt, in his book *Hallmarks of Lutheran Identity* points out that "Christian apologetics, defending the veracity of biblical evidence, is sometimes criticized for ignoring the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion. This reveals a wrong understanding. When apologists point non-Christians to the biblical facts of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, God's Word comes into play. And when God's Word is present, the Holy Spirit is present, seeking to create faith in the hearers. Here, it is important to remember it is often through the method of Christian apologetics that faith is ignited in the hearts of unbelievers." Apologetics isn't solely a response to attacks on Christianity. It should be woven into the very fabric of our Christian lives.

Being able to confidently and competently elucidate on WHAT we believe and WHY we believe it's true is essential to our discipleship and evangelism efforts both inside and outside the four walls of our religious fall-out shelters, or churches. My efforts have greatly benefited by the study of the evidence for the Christian truth-claims and the Christian worldview. As Craig says, this allows us to move from sheepishly saying "This is how I feel about it...it's just my opinion, that's all," to confidently stating "This is what I think and believe, and here are my reasons..." as we are commanded in 1 Peter 3:15. "This is most certainly true."

CONVERSION AND DISCIPLESHIP

The Rev. Luke Seamon
Pastor, Reformation Lutheran Church, Lancaster, PA

As we continue the discussion on “*making disciples*” it is important for us to understand that the Risen Jesus’ command to go into all the world and “make disciples” from Matthew 28:18-20, actually has two parts: (1) to baptize in God’s Triune Name and (2) to teach all that Christ has commanded. The first part “**to baptize**” implies the proclamation of the Gospel towards the goal of repentance and conversion of sinners to Christ. The second part - “**to teach**” - implies the continued work of teaching, training, mentoring, and equipping the baptized to follow Christ in everyday life, and to help others to follow Christ. I’d like to address the first part of Jesus’ Commission: proclamation of the Gospel of Christ leading to conversion.

Perhaps the most helpful example of this is St. Peter’s sermon to the gathered crowd in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Here we see the risen and ascended Christ fulfilling His promise to give the Church the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ will expand His Reign throughout all nations of the world. How does Christ expand His Reign? The preaching of the Word about Christ to sinners. St. Peter first proclaims that the very man they had crucified weeks before is actually God’s own Messiah (Christ) and by virtue of His resurrection has become the true King of the entire world!

“Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” (Acts 2:36)

It turns out that this terrifies the crowd! Shocked, and full of sorrow for this blasphemy against God, they turn to the Apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” This is the first aspect of conversion: preaching God’s Law to bring sinners to true sorrow and repentance for their sins. It is only when humans come face to face with our complete and utter need for God, our inability to

please God or even approach Him properly, that we are brought to true, godly sorrow for our sins.

This actually prepares us for the second aspect of conversion: faith in the risen Christ! St. Peter’s answer to the crowd lays it all out: “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

Notice that Peter does not tell the penitent crowd to simply “say the sinner’s prayer” or even to “invite Jesus into their hearts,” but tells them to “be baptized” into Christ’s name! Now, certainly someone who hears the Word of Christ, and in whom the Holy Spirit works true sorrow for their sins and true faith in Christ as God’s rescuer, will desire to pray to God. We don’t discourage prayers of those whom the Holy Spirit brings to faith. But, we must insist with Scripture that true conversion includes these things: sorrow for sins, faith in Christ as the Lord, and baptism into the Triune Name of God.

*As the Augsburg Confession states:
“For through the Word and Sacraments, as
through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given,
who works faith; where and when it pleases God,
in them that hear the Gospel.”*

This brings us to a very important point about conversion which many Protestants neglect: the work of conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit through Christ’s established “means of grace.” By “means” I mean those specific ways in which Christ established through which the Holy Spirit works to bring us to repentance and faith: the Word and the Sacraments. As the Augsburg Confession states: “For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy

Ghost is given, who works faith; where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel.”

Next, we must reject all the ideas that one is saved by “giving his heart to Jesus.” Repentance and faith are the work of the Holy Spirit through the Means of Grace. We rejoice when one cries out in faith to Christ as his own Lord, but this

is not the cause of his salvation. It is an expression of the Holy Spirit already at work in his heart and soul.



LIFE-TO-LIFE DISCIPLESHIP: ESTABLISHING A STARTING POINT

By Lee Mills, Member AMD Council, & AMD Mission Team Representative

The North American Lutheran Church is committed to Life-to-Life Discipleship. After seriously piloting this initiative for more than four years in Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and more recently in a number of other areas including eastern Pennsylvania, it has produced very positive results and gained growing interest in many Atlantic Mission District congregations.

Recently, the national Life-to-Life Discipleship Team has created a *Rapid Response Group* (RRG). The RRG is prepared to provide information, answer questions, and assist with pointing you in the right direction to get started! The primary contact has been Pr. Tom Brodbeck at tom.brodbeck@grace-nalc.org. Pr. Brodbeck asks you to please email him with the following information:

Name & contact info

(email address & phone number)

Pastor and/or congregation name & location

How can they help? Examples include...

- I want to know more.
- I want to get involved in pastoral discipleship shepherding.
- Our congregation would like someone to visit and provide an introductory presentation.
- Our congregation is ready to get involved. How do we start?

At our district level, we have four pastors who have been personally involved in discipleship coaching activities. They would welcome the opportunity to talk with you and share more about their experience. They are:

- Pr. Brett Jenkins
pastorjenkins.sts@gmail.com
- Pr. John Kulczycki
john.kulczycki@verizon.net
- Pr. Luke Seamon
pastor@reformation-nalc.org
- Pr. Brian Triller
briantriller@yahoo.com

In addition to discipleship coaching experience, Pr. Seamon and Pr. Triller have started Discipleship Learning and Leadership Teams (LLT) at their respective congregations. Several of the LLT members are themselves now leading small 3 or 4 person Life-to-Life groups in their congregations with each small group nicely growing in Christ and discipleship understanding.

In subsequent newsletters there will be additional information for congregations about discipleship implementation such as training, Learning and Leadership Teams, and Life-to-Life groups. Also, please make note of the resources listed in this, and the last issue of *The Atlantic Vine* to assist with your research, understanding, implementation, and growing in Christ as His disciple from a congregational and personal level.

RESOURCES TO GROW IN CHRIST

A GIFT —

SPREADING GOD'S WORD THROUGH MUSIC...

By Rev. Peter DeBartolo
Pastor, Evangelical Lutheran Church
Gallupville, NY

At the October AMD Convocation we told those present at the convocation about a friend of ours we've known for over 30 years. His name is *Dan Meredith* and he lives in Needmore, PA..... closer to most of the churches in the AMD than we are. Dan retired this year from being a high school music teacher for over 30 years... but what he has always been really excited about is spreading the Word of God and the Love of Christ through his music. He has a music ministry, SDG Music Ministry (Soli Deo Gloria), plus he composes, sings, plays keyboard and witnesses to the love of Christ through his music and preaching. All of his music is given away free online and people have downloaded it from around the world.

He is available much of the summer if anyone would like him to come to their church...and he does not charge. A church may, if they choose, take up a free-will gift offering, to help defray traveling costs; that's up to the host church.

He's playing and preaching here at Evangelical Lutheran in Gallupville, NY on Sunday, June 3 during our Sunday worship service. He has played and been Christ's witness at our Sunday morning worship services, special services, and our Annual Praise Nights many, many times over these 30 plus years!

We just thought we would put out a reminder again for any church that would like to host him. Dan, and his wife, Kay (who also plays piano and sings), are beautiful Christian people/friends and we're sure you would be blessed.

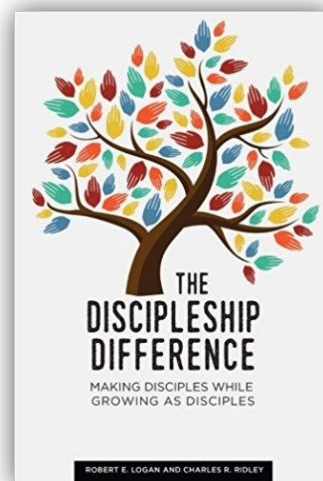
Contact Information... Dan Meredith, PO Box 121, Needmore, PA 17238

Email: dan@sdgministry.com Website: www.sdgministry.com

We extend blessings to all,
Pr. Peter DeBartolo

THE DISCIPLESHIP DIFFERENCE... MAKING DISCIPLES WHILE GROWING AS DISCIPLES

This is one of the best "how to get started" books for understanding what a disciple is and being a disciple...across denominational lines. This book provides Scriptural and practical insights that lead to growth, both personally as Christ would have us grow plus in our ability to plant seeds of faith for

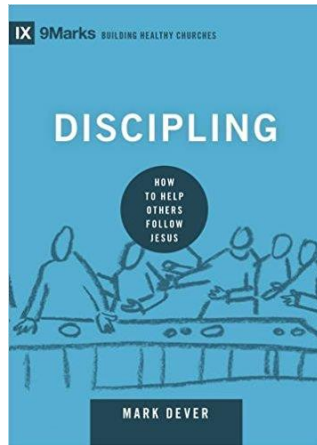


the Holy Spirit to do His work! One of the best points is that one does not need to be a Biblical scholar to be a witness for Christ. The early Christians were not Biblical Scholars...they just loved the Lord Jesus Christ! Additionally, that all important 'stepping out of our comfort zone' is also addressed. Wouldn't it be great if this book became the impetus for you to bring one more person to the feet of Christ and everlasting salvation--one more soul in heaven! Then again, maybe more than one!!!!

This book came to our attention by Pr. Mark Chavez, our NALC General Secretary.

DISCIPLING...**HOW TO HELP OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS**

What does it look like to help others become more like Christ? In this concise guide, Pr. Mark Dever outlines the who, what, where, when, why, and how of discipling—helping others follow Jesus.



Following the pattern found in scripture, this book explains how disciple-making relations should function in the context of the local church, teaching us how to cultivate a culture of discipling as a normal part of our everyday lives.

One AMD congregation is using this 10 chapter book with their church council, spending the first 20 minutes reviewing a chapter each meeting. Many new leadership seeds are planted each month!

A FEW HELPFUL WEBSITES...**CHECK THEM OUT...**

<https://www.biblegateway.com/>

Multiple Bible versions for reading, studying, using a topical index; listen to the text via audio recordings, dictionaries, study helps and other tools.

<https://www.biblica.com/>

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/>

Same as above.

<https://thebibleproject.com/>

Bible audio visuals by books of the Bible, characters, and more. A real learning tool for all and a good tool for youth.

<http://biblehub.com/>

Multiple Bible versions for reading, study and more. Make use of their English Lexicon to look up the Greek or Hebrew meanings, plus many more tools including commentaries.

<https://www.theopedia.com/>

An encyclopedia of Biblical Christianity.

<https://www.thenalc.org/daily-reading-calendars/>

Several Bible reading plans are available. This site also has a daily devotion and several downloadable apps and other resources.

DO YOU USE AN EFFECTIVE RESOURCE? SHARE IT WITH US!

Plain and simple...sharing resources helps others grow.

Share resources be they books, activities, websites, iPhone or Smartphone apps, or others you have found to be effective tools

for you personally, in your congregation, or ones you use in your small groups.

We'll all appreciate your telling us about them.

Email your shared resource/s to 'newsletter@atlantic-nalc.org' for the July 2018 edition. Let's keep adding those '*Building Blocks of Discipleship*' and ways to grow our personal relationships with Christ.'

MAKE NOTE: THE NEXT AMD NEWS

*Next submission deadline for The Atlantic Vine
Tuesday July 17th.*

*Email Judy with your communications and correspondence anytime between now and July 17th to:
newsletter@atlantic-nalc.org*

- Publicize your upcoming special events on the AMD calendar.
- Communicate what's happening in your congregation.
- Tell us about activities that foster's relationships and growing in Christ.
- Tell us about an interesting study you have done.



*“Rather, speaking the truth in love,
we are to grow up in every way
into him who is the head,
into Christ, from whom
the whole body, joined and held
together by every joint with which it is
equipped, when each part is working properly,
makes the body grow so that it builds itself
up in love.”*

Ephesians 4:15-16