

## NALC AMR THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE 2021

### *Is it Really Black and White? Gospel in the Face of Chaos and Division*

*by the Rev. Dr. Victor Belton and the Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee*

On February 11, 2021, the Rev. Dr. Victor Belton and the Rev. Dr. Maurice Lee joined several dozen pastors and lay members of the Atlantic Mission Region in a conversation regarding the current unrest in our nation and our church over race relations, the “original sin” of racism, and its impact on life and ministry in the United States. Under the leadership of AMR Dean David McGettigan and the capable moderation of the Rev. K. Craig Moorman, Belton and Lee helped the participants to explore four points of impact.

First, both setting the foundation for the discussion and pointing to the framework giving it shape, Belton repeatedly asked the questions: “We are Christian, aren’t we?” “We are Lutherans, aren’t we?” If this is so, Belton and Lee affirmed, then, according to our confessions, the scriptures, the Word of God, are the sole rule and norm for our faith and life. And this goes too for our notions of who and what human beings are, that is, our anthropology. The Bible sees all humankind as having one source: the creative hand of God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — in whose image we are formed. Discrimination on the basis of



racial differences is, for Lutheran members of the Body of Christ, simply to embrace falsehood, to reject

the truth that we are one, made and meant to be joined to Christ, the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:20).

Second, Belton and Lee discussed the need for believers to hear the voice of the Father, as opposed

to the other voices, wolves’ voices, clamoring for our attention and allegiance. Our culture is steeped in self-obsession and self-accumulation, but, as Lee noted, a key Lutheran insight is that everything good for us and good about us human beings originates *extra nos*, outside us, coming from the God who created us and loves us. Culture, family, friends, philosophies, ideologies, social and natural sciences, all claim to be able to tell us what we are, where we are going, how we should act. But Jesus said: “A stranger they [his sheep] will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:5). “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

Third, was thinking about the inescapable spiritual dimension. At root, racism is not a problem that can be solved by finances, legislation, politics, or bloodshed, because the forces sowing division and hatred are not mere flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). Ironically, Belton observed, “powers and principalities do not care about race. The enemy would love to have us all deceived and keeping him company in hell.” As unfashionable as it may be, Lee remarked, this Biblical and theological language — of unseen “powers and principalities” and “spiritual warfare” — gets us closer to the reality than can pop psychology or sociology, reductionist economic or class-conflict explanations, or glib talk of “systemic” -isms. Fundamental to Christian thinking about spiritual warfare is the realization that the victory belongs to Christ, and that, having been given a glimpse of that final truth, we may struggle in the present, with the

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strength God gives, on behalf of our fellow human beings made in his image.

Fourth, Belton and Lee suggested potential actions for participants in order to be agents of change and voices of justice among family and friends and in congregations. These included: (1) intentionally making new friends of different races and cultures; (2) reading material from the perspective of the “other”; (3) listening to new authors and artists; and even (4) pressing and calling for congregational and denominational leaders to consider making behavioral and policy changes in light of our Christian and Lutheran understanding.

In our thinking about race, as Belton pointed out, it is easy to find ourselves, and certainly to find our society, in the position of the unfortunate rustic described by Martin Luther in his *Table Talk*: “The world is like a drunken peasant. If you lift him into the saddle on one side, he will fall off again on the other side. One can’t help him, no matter how one tries. He wants to be the devil’s” (#630, 1533; Luther’s Works, vol. 54, p. 111). Extremes on both sides fail to come to grips with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and give open season for the devil’s work. But we are not of the devil. We are drawn through the waters of baptism and saved alive for the Kingdom of our Father. We will seek to represent him in all that we say and do.

The “conversational theology” that Belton and Lee were enjoying in the main presentation continued with questions from participants. Several of these brought up current matters of concern, like critical race theory, intersectionality, and cancel culture. But painting with a broad brush can be unhelpful, as Belton reminded us, recalling Paul’s experience in a riot in Ephesus: “Some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together” (Acts 19:32). Just because people walked in a Black

Lives Matter rally does not mean that they have a thorough understanding of the entire formal Marxist, deconstructionist philosophy of the group. They may have been there simply to support the fact that *black lives matter*, which is a true statement on its face. Again, it can be tempting in our time to ignore the spiritual dimension for the sake of being culturally relevant — and theologically irrelevant.

The church has had to deal with issues of accommodation to cultural pressures from the beginning. Paul “called out” Peter for refusing to associate in public with believing Gentiles, and so behaving “not in step with the truth of the gospel” (Galatians 2:14). But the question, having to do with culture, tradition, and heritage, is not a simple one. It was likely not easy for Peter or indeed for Paul to buck those conventions. It was not easy for the new church, and it will not be easy for us.

Another question was asked regarding how we are to address our brothers and sisters in Christ who support particular ideological or political positions which stand at cross-purposes with the gospel. As Belton reminded us: “We are Christians, are we not?” We begin prayerfully, listening to concerns, asking questions that may help shed the light of Christ on the issues in question. We are called to be patient, kind, forgiving, and long-suffering with compassion for the pain our brothers and sisters have experienced. We resist the urge to fix people and their philosophy on our own resources, and we appeal to God to put us and keep us in the saddle, for otherwise we will simply fall out.

Belton and Lee provided a reading list pointing to articles, books, and videos that might help participants to think from the perspective of the gospel and to walk in the shoes of the “other.” The presentation was recorded, and is available on the AMR website [www.Atlantic-NALC.org](http://www.Atlantic-NALC.org) for all to review and to incorporate in further study and discussion.

## A BLESSED ADVENTURE: FOLLOWING JESUS IN SOUTH JERSEY

*“And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’” —Mark 1:17 ESV*

*By Pastor H. Brian Triller, Emanuel Lutheran Church, Elmer, NJ*

As Jesus called His first disciples, so does He call all of us who believe in Him. Our Savior desires that we mature in our relationship with Him, learning from Him how to be disciples who share His Gospel with those whose lives touch ours. Maturing disciples learn from our Lord not only how to **be** disciples but how to be means by which He **makes** disciples.

Keeping in mind how the NALC is “committed to developing disciple-making congregations and cultures” (*NALC 2020 Vision*), this article shares how our Lord is engaging members of Emanuel Lutheran Church in Elmer, NJ in such a disciple-making process.

For all of us who are members of Emanuel, our congregational life as disciples of Jesus is founded on God's Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. Based on this foundation, in 2017 a handful of Emanuel members joined me in a new adventure as baptized believers in Jesus Christ. We made a commitment to learn together how to become more mature as disciples of Jesus. What was our intention? It was to respond to God's leading our congregation into an intentional process of disciple-making.



This blessed adventure was an outcome of the vision of Emanuel's interim pastor, Pr. David McGettigan, our AMR Dean. He became interim pastor after the congregation joined the NALC in December of 2015. As a retired pastor, I became acquainted with this congregation as I supply preached for them when Pastor David was away on business as dean. (Note: I joined the Emanuel congregation in 2018.)

In following Bishop John Bradosky's lead regarding the NALC becoming more intentional about disciple-making, Pastor David held conversations with people

within the NALC and persons connected with the Navigators who had been assisting the NALC's leadership and congregations in the building of a disciple-making culture. One of Pastor David's contacts was Cedric Brown, a Navigators staff person who became my disciple-making coach early in 2016. At Pastor David's request, Cedric came to Emanuel in October of 2016 to talk with members of the congregation about the disciple-making process.

Due to the interest generated during that October encounter, a series of events occurred within the congregation which led to a handful of invited Emanuel members joining me to begin that disciple-making adventure in 2017. At Pastor David's invitation, I served as mentor for the group, which was aptly named the “Initial Seed Group” by Pastor David. As mentor, I was passing along to the others in the group what had been passed along to me by Cedric and other sisters and brothers in Christ.

Our group began by engaging in some spiritual disciplines which have been observed in the Church since its birth on Pentecost almost 2,000 years ago. As individuals, we sought to spend time every day meditating on a portion of Holy Scripture; and then we sought to respond to that portion of God's Word. As led by the Holy Spirit, we responded to the Word of God with prayer and also sought ways to apply that Word in the activities of our daily lives.

In addition, we engaged in Christ-centered conversations with one another to share: a) what we were hearing our Lord say to us through His Word, b) how the Holy Spirit was leading us to respond to God's Word, and c) how we were seeing God at work. These conversations occurred during one-on-one phone calls and meetings when we all got together.

Engaging in these practices and sharing our *continued*

experiences with each other was a process that became more familiar and comfortable to us as we continued these disciplines in the months that followed. With Cedric's ongoing guidance, we eased into this process slowly, which allowed us to build stronger relationships with each other as we found ourselves maturing in relationship with Jesus.

During the three-plus years that our Seed Group has been together, we have studied and sought to apply the contents of several Bible-based resources on disciple-making. Such resources have helped us explore what God teaches in His Word regarding our being disciples through whom He works to make more disciples. These resources include:

- *Graying in Grace: Becoming Mature Disciples of Jesus Christ*, by Pr. Brad Hales
- *The Ways of the Alongsider: Growing Disciples Life to Life*, by Bill Mowry
- *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, by Greg Ogden
- *Joining Jesus on His Mission: How to Be an Everyday Missionary*, by Pr. Greg Finke

As time went on, I began asking other Seed Group members to lead specific segments of our twice-monthly meetings. By gradually taking on opportunities to lead portions of our meetings, the other Seed Group members were gaining experience that would help them when they began coming alongside other sisters and brothers in Christ in the disciple-making process.

In 2018, we began praying that the Holy Spirit would lead us to identify particular believers to invite to join us in a discipleship journey similar to the one begun by the Seed Group in 2017. By early 2019, our Seed Group had gone from a membership of 6 people to 4: Judy Cellmer, Dianne Hermanson, Patsy Madden, and me. One of our initial members had gone to be with our Lord, and another moved out of state.

In 2019, the four of us began inviting particular members of Emanuel to join with us in the disciple-making process. The responses to our invitations included “no,” “yes,” and “not now” replies. At the time of this writing, two of our Seed Group members are working one-to-one with two people from our church; and another Seed Group member is leading a group of three. In these intentional, small-group settings, and in other settings as well, all of us in the Seed Group have experienced our Lord guiding us to serve Him by sharing with others what He has shared with us.

One way in which we have been serving our Lord within the congregation is as assistants during the healing services, which our congregation includes during Sunday worship four times per year (on hold during the pandemic). We serve in pairs at two separate prayer stations to pray, lay on hands, and anoint persons seeking our Lord's healing.

In the spring of 2019, the Holy Spirit led our congregation to call Pastor Mark Werner to serve as full-time pastor. Pastor Mark was led to seek a call from Emanuel because he was interested in working with a congregation that had already begun to grow an intentional disciple-making culture.

Pastor Mark was eager to join with our Seed Group members in its disciple-making ministry when he came on board in July of 2019. Just as I was being coached in disciple-making by Cedric, Pastor Mark was being coached in disciple-making by Pastor Brett Jenkins, Dean of the AMR's Northeast District. At the end of 2020, I concluded my coaching relationship with Cedric. I am very thankful for all of the ways our Lord worked through Cedric to guide me and our Seed Group since we began the disciple-making process at Emanuel in 2017.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, and assisted by our respective coaches, Pastor Mark and I engaged in a transition process regarding leadership of the Seed Group. As our congregation's pastor and as a

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member of the current Seed Group, Pastor Mark is the leader of the group and the overseer of the disciple-making process within our congregation. I continue my regular one-on-one phone calls with the other Seed Group members, during which we share how we are hearing our Lord speak to us and how we are seeing Him at work. We pray for each other, and I assist and support them as they seek to serve as disciples through whom Jesus makes more disciples.

Our Seed Group now meets once or twice a month, and Pastor Mark and I plan the meeting agendas together. When our group meets, we engage in some of the same practices that we employ during our one-on-one calls. And we also take time to do some Bible study or other Christ-centered learning and/or discussion together.

During the late summer and early autumn of 2020, Pastor Mark led our Seed Group through an adapted Navigators Bible study which assists congregations in developing a mission statement. Then our group presented a custom-tailored version of this Mission Bible study to members of our Church Council. The next step is to have small groups within our congregation work on this study in cottage meetings co-led by some of the Council and Seed Group members. The end goal is for our members to generate and own a mission statement to guide us in following Jesus faithfully as He make us “*fishers of men.*” Following Jesus is always a blessed adventure.

*Want to talk more about Emanuel's discipleship journey?  
Contact Pr. Brian at [briantriller@protonmail.com](mailto:briantriller@protonmail.com)*

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## MAKING YOUR CONGREGATION AND THE NALC KNOWN

### TECHNOLOGY AND THE AMR

*By Dean Dan Schaefer and AMR Technology Team*

*“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keeping your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” —Romans 12:9-13*

Dear Friends in Christ,

It almost goes without saying, we are blessed in the NALC. But we can’t go without saying it and we can’t go without sharing with others the great gift and responsibility we have been given. We are a Church that is Christ-Centered, Mission-Driven, Traditionally-Grounded, and Congregationally-Focused. This is tremendous and people need to know who we are and where we are. Some of our Churches are unknown to their own community. Some of our Churches are the “best kept secret” in the area according to one Church member who along with his family recently joined one of our Churches.

We want to let the “secret” out and the Atlantic Mission Region has a plan. Before Easter, there will be some advertising. One Church in each Mission District will be part of the initial effort. This will



include short videos on You Tube and Google ads. There will be links to the local congregations and their websites.

There will be links to the NALC including some already existing videos that will be edited for the purpose of advertising. Once we try this out and work out some of the bugs, any NALC Congregation in the Region that is interested will have the opportunity to participate and customize the outreach as best suits them. There will be tech support for your Congregation and initial costs have been covered. Pastors Brett Jenkins and Dan Schaefer are coordinating this outreach with the support of the Atlantic Mission Region Council.

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In preparation for Easter, and while this plan starts to take shape there are some things you and your Congregation can do:

- If you have a website make sure it is up to date with current information (that's how most people find a Church these days, make sure your location and contact information are clear, and your address is listed). Eventually, that's the link people will follow from the advertising to find you.
- If you have any kind of signs along the road, make sure they are visible, clean and readable, with current information so people can find you.
- Make sure your Ushers and Greeters are prepared to welcome visitors. Ushers should not just pass out a bulletin and say Good Morning, but also help Visitors find a seat and put them in the most comfortable seat for them, which will most likely be towards the back where most regular Lutherans sit. You may have to ask some of those regular Lutherans to move. That's showing hospitality. Would you want to sit all the way up front if you were a Visitor? Greeters should be prepared to actually speak to people and possibly start a brief conversation by introducing themselves and letting the Visitor

know who they are and how long they have been affiliated with the Church, and what they like about the Church. This will be different for most of our Churches where we ask everybody if they know who the Visitor is rather than go up and talk to the person. Ushers and Greeters need to be "people-persons." You don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

These are some practical tips for welcoming people to your Church. After a year of COVID restrictions, people are hungry for Worship and Fellowship in Person. You can take appropriate precautions which we have all learned over the past year. Those include social distancing, masks, hand sanitizer, and whatever else is appropriate for your Congregation.

There will be a follow up after Easter to process how the advertising worked and make adjustments so it can be shared with any interested NALC Congregation in the Region. The message of the Gospel doesn't get any better than the Death and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ! Will you be ready to share it with those who need it so desperately?

*For more information email:*

*Rev. Dan Schaefer: [rev.dan@verizon.net](mailto:rev.dan@verizon.net)*

*Rev. Brett Jenkins: [pastorjenkins.sts@gmail.com](mailto:pastorjenkins.sts@gmail.com)*

**Highlights!**

## AMR Council Highlights January 23, 2021 via GoToMeeting

*By Robin Harris, Administrative Assistant to the Deans and Council of the AMR*

- The AMR Council met via GoToMeeting on Saturday, January 23, 2021. All deans and lay reps were in attendance.
- Guests from Reformation LC (Culpeper, VA) shared their experiences with their congregation's **Prayer Ministry Team network**. The Council is interested in developing a Region-wide prayer network but will focus first on the Southern Mission District (with Reformation's guidance) to see how it goes before expanding into the other Districts. The end goal is for each congregation in the Region to have an active prayer ministry

team who would hold frequent prayer meetings and occasional District-wide prayer and healing services (in person). More information will be forthcoming to the Region as this ministry develops.

- **Financial Reports:** Treasurer Kathy Lilley presented the 2020 year-end financial reports which were approved by the Council.
- **Seminarian Aid:** Kathy is finalizing an AMR seminarian financial aid application that was adapted from the NALC seminarian financial aid application. Seminarians will be able to apply for

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financial aid from the AMR after the NALC's candidacy committee meetings in March and again in July.

- Robin Harris reported the postponed **2020 virtual Theological Conference** *Is It Really Black & White? Gospel in the Face of Chaos and Division* (scheduled for February 11, 2021) was ready to go and she was receiving registrations.
- The **2021 Theological Conference** (currently scheduled for Thursday, September 16) will tentatively be held in person at St. John LC, Birdsboro, PA. The topic will focus on worship.
- The **2021 AMR regional Convocation** is tentatively scheduled for an in person gathering on Friday, October 22 & Saturday, October 23 at Holy Cross ELC, Nazareth, PA. The focus will be the continued conversation on worship with an added experiential component.
- **Congregational Meetings & Voting:** The Council discussed the new challenge of how congregations may hold congregation meetings, including how to handle voting, when some participants are in person and some are virtual. Pr. Steve Shipman will write a short description of how this can be done. This procedure has been vetted by Pr. Mark Chavez.
- The **Renewal & Discipleship Ministry Team** chair Lee Mills (Reformation LC, Lancaster, PA) gave a report from the RDMT. The team is hard at work developing an interactive workshop that will be introduced at each Mission District's spring convocation. They are looking for more members (either clergy or lay) for this team. If interested contact Lee at [lmills.email@comcast.net](mailto:lmills.email@comcast.net).

- **Seminarian Liaison:** Pr. Brad Hales (Reformation LC, Culpeper, VA) is now the liaison between the AMR and the seminarians from our Region.
- **Covid-era Workshop:** Dean David McGettigan is currently working on developing a COVID-era model congregation workshop that may be adapted to suit the individual congregation's needs.
- **Clergy Spouse Support:** A clergy spouse support group is in the process of being developed.
- **District Reports:** Each dean and lay representative gave a report of congregations in transition or situations from their respective Mission Districts.
- **Mission District Convocations:** Each Mission District's spring Convocation is tentatively planned to be in-person with a virtual option. There was discussion concerning some of the things that need to be included at each meeting, especially the nomination process for a new Regional Dean (to be elected in October).
- **Technology Ministry Team:** The AMR Tech Ministry Team gave a report to the Council on the progress of the Facebook and YouTube advertisements for the AMR that are currently being developed.
- **Registration Fees:** Kathy Lilley will be setting up a way for all AMR and district event participants to register and pay for events online. This eliminates sending a paper check for events as the only way to pay a registration fee, although that will remain an option for those who choose it.
- District convocation dates, see page 8.

## ROSTER UPDATES IN THE ATLANTIC MISSION REGION

  
Updates

- The **Rev. Ray Scheck** is serving as interim at Bethany LC (Montoursville, PA).
- The **Rev. Brian Hughes** is serving as interim at St. Luke LC (Bloomsburg, PA).
- **Altalaha Lutheran Church** (Rehlersburg, PA) was approved as a congregation of the NALC on November 26, 2020. Altalaha LC is now a congregation of the Central Mission District.
- **Rev. Ted Hummel** (Sattazahn LC) was approved as NALC clergy on January 28, 2021.
- **Rev. Mark Chavez**, retiring as General Secretary of the NALC after 10 years. He will serve as full time interim pastor at his home congregation, Reformation LC, Lancaster, PA, beginning May 10<sup>th</sup>.



## Spring AMR District Convocations

*(All tentatively in-person with a virtual option: Times to be announced.)*

**Central Mission District – Saturday, May 8** at St. John LC, Birdsboro, PA

**Northeast Mission District – Saturday, May 15** at Trinity LC, Clarks Summit, PA

**Southern Mission District – Saturday, May 22** at Lebanon LC, Lebanon Church, VA

**Western Mission District – Saturday, June 5**, location TBA

## AMR WOMEN'S RETREAT – IN PERSON

### SATURDAY, MAY 1 AT ZOAR ELC, LEBANON, PA

**Theme:** *Whispers of God's Love* (based on Isaiah 43:1)

**Time:** 9 AM – 3:30 PM with lunch included

**Cost:** \$20/person

**Registration Deadline:** Monday, April 19

*Fear not, for I have  
Redeemed You;  
I have summoned you by name,  
you are mine.*  
Isaiah 43:1

Covid protocols will be in place (masks required, distancing and sanitation will be in place)

*Seating is limited*, so register early. Registration materials will be sent out soon

More information will soon be posted on AMR website: "[www.Atlantic-NALC.org](http://www.Atlantic-NALC.org)"

## WORDS OF WISDOM FOR THE BODY & LIFE

*Author: Dr. Patrick Teefy, Cardiology Head*

*Nuclear Medicine Institute University Hospital, London Ontario*

*Submitted by Wayne Knerr, Emanuel Lutheran Church, Elmer, NJ*

An important potential life-saving message.

Let's say it's 7:25 pm and you're going home (alone of course) after an unusually hard day on the job. You're really tired, upset and frustrated.

Suddenly you start experiencing severe pain in your chest that starts to drag out into your arm and up into your jaw. You are only a about three miles from the hospital nearest your home.

Unfortunately, you don't know if you'll be able to make it that far. You have been trained in CPR, but the guy that taught the course did not tell you how to perform it on yourself.

### **How to Survive a Heart Attack When Alone**

Since many people are alone when they suffer a heart attack without help, the person whose heart is beating improperly and



who begins to feel faint, has only about 10 seconds left before losing consciousness. However, these victims can help themselves by coughing repeatedly and very vigorously.

- A deep breath should be taken before each cough, and the cough must be deep and prolonged, as when producing sputum from deep inside the chest.
- A breath and a cough must be repeated about every two seconds without let-up until help arrives, or until the heart is felt to be beating normally again.
- Deep breaths get oxygen into the lungs and coughing movements squeeze the heart and keep the blood circulating. The squeezing pressure on the heart also helps it to regain a normal rhythm.



## ATLANTIC MISSION REGION & DISTRICT CONTACTS

### ATLANTIC MISSION REGION COUNCIL

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### ORGANIZATIONAL STAFF

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### GoToMEETING REMINDER...



A reminder that any AMR Congregations currently not utilizing Zoom, GoToMeeting, or other tech meeting rooms have access to GoToMeeting by contacting our AMR administrator Robin Harris at *rjhb67@gmail.com*.

## THE AMR ATLANTIC VINE



**Share your stories...let others know the joy of how God is working in your congregation.**

*This newsletter communicates beyond congregational staff. Please distribute widely to congregational members and beyond.*

*Email Judy with newsletter submissions, communication, and correspondence to: [news.atlantic.nalc@gmail.com](mailto:news.atlantic.nalc@gmail.com).*

- Submissions may be made by congregational members too!
- Publize any special events or special stories about members of your congregation.
- Share an interesting discipleship story or effective resources your congregation is using.