



THE EMMANUEL EPISTLE

"Praising, Proclaiming and Practicing Emmanuel—God with us—in daily life!"

Pastor's Keyboard: "Discipleship—Martyrs for Jesus"

Jesus offered this promise to His disciples: "You shall receive power (*dynamite*) when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses (*martyrs*)...to the end of the earth."

Lee Pearce and I recently returned home from the NALC Convocation in Dallas, TX. The theme of the Convocation was: "Martyr—Life-Giving Witness". The focus of the Convocation was on discipleship and the gift of losing one's life for Jesus. *See pages 3-5 for highlights from our time in Dallas.*

Jesus talked a lot about cross-bearing & discipleship: "Whoever would save their life," Jesus said, "will lose it. But whoever loses their life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." Are we saving or losing our lives? Remember the words of St. Paul: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain (*more Christ*)."

One particularly moving address at the Convocation was a presentation by Margaret Khamoo. Her parents were born in Bagdad, Iraq. Speaking on behalf of the Iraqi Christian Relief Council



(Glenville, IL), Margaret described the persecution of Assyrian Christians in Iraq. Modern day Iraqi Christians (Assyrians, also known as Chaldeans & Syriacs) are descendants of the Assyrians & the Babylonians.

Hear Them. Heal Them. Save the Flickering Light of Christianity in Iraq!"

Most of us are familiar with Assyria, the nation that conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. We are also familiar with the story of Jonah and the conversion of Nineveh, and its destruction in 612 B.C. Assyrian history spans over 6760 years. Assyria was the birth place of Abraham (Ur of Chaldea, by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers). Assyrian Christians speak Aramaic, the language of our Lord Jesus. Assyria was the first nation that accepted Christ. Every 45 years

there has been a slaughter (genocide) of Christians in Assyria. The goal of the present persecution is ethnic & religious cleansing, seeking to completely eradicate Christianity.

Assyrian Christians are called Nazarenes and their homes are marked for persecution. They either convert, pay the protection tax and live as subjugated people, leave Iraq empty-handed, or are killed. Approximately 1 million Assyrian Christians have been forced to become refugees inside & outside of Iraq since 2003.

Scripture calls us to stand with our persecuted brothers & sisters: "*Look carefully into this matter of Christians imprisoned for their faith. Though it may not appear this way to the eye, you are bound together with them since you, too, are liable to similar physical punishment.*"—Hebrews 13:3

A Living Witness, Pastor Dave

**September 2015
Newsletter
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Food For Thought:



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International Church of Vilnius, Lithuania

Rev. Jim & Diane Wagner were with us on June 27 as Emmanuel Lutheran celebrated our global ministry partnership with the International Church of Vilnius (ICV). Emmanuel gave the Wagners a gift of \$1000.00 as an offering of support for our sister congregation in Lithuania. Here is the Thank You we recently received:

Dear Pastor Dave,

Thank you very much for your church's generous support to the International Church of Vilnius. Pastor Jim passed me the gift of USD 1,000 from Emmanuel Lutheran Church on Sunday - a very welcome surprise! We do rejoice when churches overseas support us as, although we have existed for around 15 years now, we are only just beginning to support ourselves having lost the support of the ECLA due to cutbacks in 2009.

After more than three years without a permanent pastor, we have been blessed to have Jim and Diane Wagner with us since September 2013. They have bought much needed stability to the church & we have begun to see steady growth both in terms of Sunday attendance and in engagement with church activities. This said we remain a small congregation averaging around 30 people with only a handful of us to lead the various activities. We have however run Bible Studies, a Christianity Explored course (similar to Alpha), a day retreat (led by Diane), had numerous social activities & are engaged in supporting a local project that supports the homeless and those on low income. Many of our congregation are students and having said goodbye to many in June, we look forward to seeing who will join us next month.

Please do continue to pray for us: that we would proclaim the gospel in Vilnius both through church activities and our individual lives; that we would grow spiritually and grow in numbers (we are yet to reach a point at which we could be financially self-sufficient: if it weren't for the Wagners kindly taking no salary/allowance, we would not be able to support them).

Blessings to you in Christ,
Nic (ICV Treasurer)

Church Pictorial Directory

Members of Emmanuel Lutheran are having their pictures taken for a Church Directory. Thanks for sharing a photo and your contact information with your church family. We hope to have the Directory printed and ready for distribution by the end of September. Church Directories are an excellent tool for communication & for offering intercessions for the Body of Christ. There is still time to submit a photo.

SEMAC 2016

Larry Vomof will be taking a crew of Christ-centered servants to Brookport-Unionville, IL in 2016. They will be offering compassion in the name of Jesus and restoration of hope to people devastated by natural disaster. SEMAC stands for "South East Minnesota Area Christians".

The two weeks of service will be February 7-20, 2016. Deb Vomhof will be the crew chef. If you would like to participate (1 or 2 weeks) in this mission trip, contact Larry or Deb for more information. Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 10. Maybe you want to make a mission trip a part of your Lenten discipline?

EMMANUEL CHURCH PICNIC

Our God is awesome. The weather was a little chilly, but the food was excellent & the fellowship was outstanding. We offer thanks to Deb & Larry Vomhof for hosting our second annual church picnic. At least 41 people were present. Next year's date has already been selected, Mark August 7, 2016 on your calendar and plan on attending. Save the Date!

RALLY DAY for SATURDAY SCHOOLD

We hope you are ready for another fun year of Saturday School. We will kick off our new year on Rally Day which is Saturday, September 19th at 5:10pm in the fellowship hall. Bring your family and we will decorate cookies and play a few games. We will again be learning about stories and people in the Bible, and using games, skits and crafts. A special unit on the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed will also be offered during the year. We hope to see you all there!

PRAYING FOR OUR SCHOOLS

Each month, on the 15th day of the month, we pray for an area school. During the month of September we are praying for Pinewood Elementary and delivering goodies as an expression of our love & gratitude. Our pianist, MarJean Damerval, is a music teacher at Pinewood Elementary.



NALC Convocation—Pages 3-5

Lee Pearce & Pastor Dave Steffenson attended the NALC Convocation as voting delegates of Emmanuel Lutheran Church on August 12-14. Attendance at the Convocation was: 581 total participants (226 clergy, 406 lay delegates, and 175 staff, seminarians and visitors).

MISSION INTENSIVE

The Convocation was preceded on Wednesday, August 12 with a “**Mission Intensive**” focusing on what it means to be Mission Driven in the NALC, in our Mission Districts, and in our Individual Congregations. “Hey fishermen, stop waiting for the fish to find you.” Did you know that the average Lutheran invites a person to come to church once every 7.5 years?

Bishop John Bradosky asked us a question: “Are we simply promoting involvement and membership in an institution? Are we programmed focused? Preserving the institution hinders mission and feeds into the consumer mentality. We can’t pass on what we don’t know. We can’t give what we haven’t got. Discipleship is about knowing Christ, living the faith & being in accountable relationships.” We were encouraged to practice “Life-to-Life Discipleship”; person-to-person relationships. Discipleship isn’t legalism; it’s the fruit of salvation and the response of grace. Discipleship begins and ends IN CHRIST. The path is the WAY, the map is the TRUTH, and the Destination is the LIFE. Plug into the Biblical GPS – John 14:1-6.

Pastor Dave visited with Bishop Bradosky about the Model Constitution of the NALC & its “membership” language. Our Bishop agreed that such language impedes our focus on discipleship. It was encouraging to see that Emmanuel’s emphasis on annual Discipleship Covenants & an Annual Covenant Renewal Ceremony (Joshua 24—Shechem) in January each calendar year, is in alignment with the NALC’s goals and objectives for ministry.

Dr. Gemechis Buba led us in a reflection on 4 missional questions: 1) What is the vision of mission drivers? 2) Who are the mission drivers in the NALC? 3) How do mission drivers behave & what are the essential characteristics of mission drivers? 4) What are the basic practices and actions of mission drivers? As you might expect, Dr. Buba energized all in attendance. He reminded us that our vision is to “awaken, equip and mobilize” individuals for the Great Commission. All of us in the NALC—mission districts, congregations, and individual Christ-followers are responsible for being mission drivers. There are no exemptions. The **GO** of the Great Commission is inclusive and universal. Dr. Buba described the characteristics of

mission drivers. He referred to them as “faith practices”. At Emmanuel we call them “marks of discipleship”. Later in the Convocation, Dr. Buba also offered reflections on John 21: Jesus said, “Have you any fish? Throw you nets on the right side.” Dr. Buba reminded us that there is no one, single way of doing mission in the NALC; but each way must be congregationally focused and not institutionally driven. The transition from a program-driven church to a Disciple-producing congregation is not without challenges. We can’t manage or control the infiltration of the Holy Spirit. Mission is: new church plants, congregational renewal, international missions, the Great Commission Society, multinational ministries (“no more from West to Rest, but from Everywhere to Everywhere”), theologians without borders (go to teach and to learn), and mission enhancement initiatives. In John 21, seven disciples were obsessed with themselves. “Do you have any fish?” NO! “Throw your nets.” They did. Obedience resulted in a **HUGE CATCH**...and then they recognized Jesus.

PANEL PRESENTATION

Following Dr. Buba, a panel of 6 people shared mission & outreach success stories and roadblocks. How might roadblocks to mission be an opportunity to see and do new things; i.e. “detours”. Presenters shared insights with us. **“Caution: Speed Bumps Ahead”.**

Pastor Trina Petersen reminded us of Proverbs 29:18 (Without a vision the people perish). Habakkuk 2:2-3 reminds us that the vision needs to plain so that the one who reads it may run (or, the one who runs may read it).

Rev. Dr. David Wendel spoke about conflict in congregations as a roadblock to missional success. He cited two studies: A study of 14,000+ congregations in 2000 found that 75% experienced some level of conflict. In 2008, another study found that 74% of congregations were in conflict over leadership, money or finances. Dr. Wendel reminded us that conflict is not the roadblock to mission. Instead it is our avoidance and unwillingness to address and resolve the conflict.

Pastor Brad Hales reminded us that over 75% of Lutheran congregations have plateaued or are declining in the USA. Declining worship attendance and biblical illiteracy are being accepted as normal and inevitable. It need not be so. **“The Church is not going down on my watch!” he said.** By the power of Jesus Christ, the church (we) can be revived to thrive! Pastors need to be shepherds of God’s flock in touch with the Great “I Am” and casting the vision that God has given them.



NALC Treasurer, Ryan Schwartz, quoted Proverbs 3:9-10 and reminded us to honor the LORD with our substance and with our first fruits. Congregational budgets are mission plans and need to be shaped around our biblical understandings of stewardship. Ryan encouraged NALC congregations to “align means and mission”. “We must commit what we have & what we are to the spread of the Gospel, rather than the maintenance of the institution.” Needless to say Ryan was preaching to the choir. Ryan reminded us that a key component to sound financial management is realistic budgeting. Church budgets reveal our preferences & priorities. How we spend our time and money reveal our real priorities and values. What do we do when past donors’ priorities (Endowment gifts) are not consistent with today’s missional opportunities? What is your congregation’s approach to benevolence? “The NALC Convocation has adopted a ‘prayerful goal’ that congregations allocate 12% of their annual budget to all external benevolence.”

Pastor Dave Keener spoke about “**Evangeliphobia**” (the unnatural fear of evangelism). “We have forgotten that the invitation by Jesus to those early disciples was an invitation to a journey, not a gathering.” Jesus tells his disciples, “I will make you fishers of men” and then he spends three years doing just that.

Pastor Jody Becker ended with a presentation on the roadblock of the SELF. Statistics regarding clergy burnout are alarming. Pastors need to do a better job of holistic self-care. “Clergy are called to *example the faith*. Clergy don’t have to die for the church. Someone else has already done that.”

The remainder of the day was spent on developing **congregational and mission district roadmaps**. A summary of our mission districts roadmaps will be presented at the Emmanuel “Information Exchange” on Saturday, September 12 following worship. We will also combine our efforts & begin constructing an Emmanuel roadmap. Emmanuel Lutheran is a member of two mission districts: Minkota and Iowa. Lee attended the Iowa Mission District Meeting and Pastor Dave attended the Minkota Mission District Meeting.

NALC CONVOCATION HIGHLIGHTS—Thursday& Friday, August 13-14, 2016

The NALC Convocation began with opening worship and was called to order on Thursday, August 13. Several introductions were made. Rev. Dr. Amy Schifrin, president of the North American Lutheran Seminary (NALS) asked us to do three things for our Seminary: pray and send students; give generously and cheerfully; and visit our seminary. During the Convocation, 34 NALS students were introduced. Eight newly ordained pastors were also introduced. **Elections were held** during the Convocation. Rev. John Bradosky was reelected as bishop of the NALC on the first ballot; unexpectedly, there was a nomination from the floor (Rev. James Lehmann), who received 65 votes. Elections were also held for positions on the Executive Council.

Our first keynote speaker was the Rev. Bassam J. Abdallah, who led us in our Bible Study on **Acts 26:16-18** (Our theme verse for the Convocation): “*But rise and stand upon your feet, for I (Jesus) have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me, and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles – to whom I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.*” In his defense before King Agrippa, Paul recounts his conversion on the Damascus Road. Saul/Paul was a persecutor of the Christian Faith, but Jesus appeared to him and commissioned him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9). Pastor Abdallah reminded us that Christ’s promise of “power from on high” is for bearing witness to Jesus (Acts 1:8). *The Greek word for witness is martyr*. A Martyr/Witness is someone who gives their life for the Christian faith. St. Paul and St. Peter were martyred around A.D. 68. “St. Stephen (Acts 7) was not a witness because he died. He died because he was a witness.” It was noted that in the past 100 years, more than 3 million Christians have been martyred. 1.5 million Armenian Christians were slaughtered in the early 1900’s. What does Saudi Arabia do to someone caught holding or possessing a bible? Four fingers and the thumb of the right hand are put into a shredder. Did you know, that in spite of the rampant persecution of Christians globally, that **6 million Muslims are converting to Christianity on the continent of Africa every year?** That’s 16,000 conversions a day; 667 every hour. Praise God! Did you know that the recent beheadings of 21 Coptic Christians in Libya was actually misreported? There were 20 Coptic Christians beheaded. The 21st beheading was a recent convert whom ISIS tried to convince to renounce his faith, but he refused. He stood beside his Coptic friends and said, “Their God is my God.” He was a martyr for Christ. Pastor Abdallah reminded us that Christ is calling each of us; sending us to open the eyes of 21st century Gentiles, so that they may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. So that they may receive the



forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in Jesus. Martyrdom awaits us. Preach & practice forgiveness in the name of Jesus.

The **2016 NALC Budget** was approved as presented. It was noted that the budget is comprised of three budgets: The Operating budget (\$1,989,408); Seminary budget (\$450,030); & Dedicated Funds budgets (Great Commission Fund, \$170,000; & Theological Education Fund, \$625,860). It was noted that the 2016 Operating budget includes funding for two new staff positions (Communications Coordinator, and Youth & Family Ministry) with no salary increase for present staff. The congregational share to meet budget is a tithe of 5-8%. It was also noted that the NALC will offer a self-funded health care plan, backed by an insurer, for 2016. Unlike other medical plans, the NALC plan will actually result in a decrease of premiums for 2016.

An **NALC constitutional change was approved** and will now need ratification by member congregations. Previously, in partnership with Lutheran Core, the NALC had a Joint Commission on Theology and Doctrine. With the changing focus of Lutheran Core, the NALC will now have its own Commission on Theology and Doctrine. It is anticipated that Emmanuel will address this NALC constitutional change at our Annual Meeting in January of 2016.

Our second keynote speaker was Robert Spencer. Security was tight. Spencer is an American author & blogger best known for his criticism of Islam & jihad. As of 2014, he has published 12 books. Spencer does not believe that traditional Islam is "inherently terroristic" but says he can prove that "traditional Islam contains violent and supremacist elements",

and that "its various schools unanimously teach warfare against, and the subjugation of, unbelievers". He rejects the notion that all Muslims are necessarily violent people.

Spencer cited numerous passages from the Qur'an, indicating that Islam is not a religion of peace for those who do not follow Allah. Muslims are obligated to be executors of the will of Allah (e.g. "If they turn away, Allah will sternly punish them in this world and in the hereafter. Allah will chastise them through you."). ISIS is doing what the Qur'an tells them to do. Faithful Muslims are obligated to make war on unbelievers. Christians are allowed to live in peace as long as they pay the protection tax and live as subjugated people. Those refusing to pay the tax are killed. ISIS says, "We look in the barrel of your guns and we see paradise. We love death more than we love life." The Qur'an says, "If you claim that you are God's chosen people, then long for death." Islamic State is obligated to create ruins as testimony of the judgment of Allah on unbelievers. The goal of radical Islam is supremacy. Radical Islam begins by preaching tolerance and then, as they grow, they move to warfare. The Qur'an says that "people of the book" (i.e. Jews and Christians) are the "most vilest of all creatures".

Discipleship moments (2 minute videos) were offered throughout the Convocation. Perhaps Emmanuel can look at producing one of its own. A resolution was passed asking the NALC to study the process used for election of a future bishop of our church. Numerous guests brought greetings. Reports were received from Lutheran World Relief, and the NALC Disaster Response. Several people were recognized, including Emeritus Bishop Paull Spring, who was celebrating 50 years of ordination. Bishop Spring renewed his ordination vows. Gifts of \$10,000+ was given to the NALS in

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honor of Bishop Spring's 50th anniversary of ordination. Emmanuel also submitted a gift. Throughout the Convocation, we were treated to the talents of a gifted Canadian musician named Steve Bell.

Bishop John Bradosky offered the following highlights: 1) Don't neglect worship. Worship feeds us for discipleship; God's weekly provision of Manna. 2) We need to teach the faith, live the faith and share the faith. Mutual accountable relationships are essential to discipleship. 3) Life-to-life Discipleship. Relationships matter. We can't be in Christ and not be in Church. 4) Passing on the faith is proof that we are growing up into the full maturity of Christ. 5) A new Youth & Family ministry resource is available to NALC congregations, called "Faith Webbing". Youth ministry is youth doing ministry and being ministers.

Rev. Dr. Cathi Braasch, a retired pastor from Nebraska, spoke about the "Holy Families! Initiative", corresponding with the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of the Ninety-Five Theses. This NALC Initiative received a Thrivent Grant of \$22,500. Cathi was a five generation Mormon, who at the age of 8 learned about the Christian faith in VBS, and became a Christ-follower. She and her husband have been married for 49 years. This initiative will help NALC congregations build healthy families and healthy marriages. Holy Families! celebrates and supports Christian marriage & family life as good and godly vocation.

The final keynote speaker was Margaret Khamoo, who spoke about the plight of Assyrian Christians in Iraq, who are being systematically annihilated by ISIS. We watched a documentary entitled, "The Last Plight" (www.thelastplight.com).

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SAVE THE DATE!

Christmas With Emmanuel!

Join us as we celebrate the birth of our Lord on Thursday, December 24 at 4:00 p.m. at Oasis Church. Invite your family and friends to join us for Christmas Eve Worship.

Oasis Church Family Night Schedule Starts Wednesday, September 9

3:00-5:00 Homework Help (K-12)
5:00-6:00 Family Dinner
6:00-7:00 (Childcare, Children's Programming, Youth Group and Adult Small Groups)
7:00-7:15 Family Worship Time
7:15-8:15 Small Groups (Childcare, Choir and Adult Small Groups)

Small Group Opportunities—6pm

Bridget Berkland: "Wise Women" – A study on Proverbs to help with everyday life issues!

Steve & Brenda Akin: "Raising Godly Children in an Ungodly World" (DVD), Leaving a Lasting Legacy - by Ken Ham & Steve Ham

Dan Berkland: "Twisting the Truth" (DVD) - by Andy Stanley

Small Group Opportunities—7:15pm

Geno Pyse: "Ephesians Bible Study"

Dave Hammond: "To Be Determined"

Brian Dunbar: "Choir" - singing on Sunday mornings once a month

Emmanuel Members are invited to sign up for Oasis Family Night. Please sign up by Sunday, September 6.

Emmanuel Cinema: This fall we will view and discuss two thought-provoking films: "October Baby" on Sept. 27 and "Do You Believe?" on Reformation Sunday, October 25. More information will be coming on location & time.



Back Page Stories

Men's Bible Study Breakfast:

Weekly fellowship around God's Word at 8am Tuesdays at Charlie's (1408 2nd. St. SW). Join us in being Evangelical. Invite a friend.

Supermarket Saturday: The next Channel One opportunity is Sept. 19, 2015 (9 am—Noon).

Women of the Word! Women's Bible Study resumes on Wednesday, September 9 at 1pm. We'll be studying famous Women in Scripture. An evening option will also be available for women not able to attend the afternoon study. Watch the weekly bulletins for more details.

Bible Saturday: Thanks to Gary Froiland for his Gideon presentation

at worship on August 29. Thanks also to everyone who supported the Gideons with an offering. Anyone in need of a Bible should contact Pastor Dave. "God's Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path." We don't want anyone walking or living in darkness without the Light. Pastor Dave also has Devotions on the Gospel of Mark for families wishing to participate in Bible Reading.

Council Highlights (August 10):

Special Thanks to Pastor Tim Duesenberg and his wife Leslie for leading us in worship on August 8. Thanks to Pastor Chris Brekke for leading us in worship on August 15. YTD Thrivent Choice Dollars: \$1,486. Thanks to all who designate their Choice Dollars to Emmanuel. Oasis Church is launching a new

ministry initiative on Wednesdays beginning this Fall. Our next Information Exchange will be on September 12 following worship. The Church Council is working on Strategic Planning. The next Council Meeting is on Sept. 15 at 10:30am.

Thank You: Thanks to Larry Vomhof for anchoring our church safe to the floor.

Marks of Discipleship: Signposts guide our way—Disciples seek to pray daily, worship weekly, grow spiritually, read & study Scripture on a regular basis, serve others, share the good news, & give generously.

Looking Ahead: Women of Emmanuel are coordinating a Veteran's Appreciation event, scheduled for Mon, Nov. 9. Watch for more details.