



KEYNOTE: PASTOR AL SAGER
“Discipleship for the Journey”



Last year’s keynote address by Pastor Joe Nilsen highlighted that the VdC is about the journey, not the experience. Pastor Sager takes last year’s message another step, to move us from the experience into discipleship. Pastor Al Sager is a retired ELCA pastor and emeritus seminary professor. He and his wife Erline are members of Christ Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio. This will be Pastor Al’s 50th year of ministry since his

ordination and he is rostered through the Indiana/Kentucky Synod. He made Men’s #6 in Atlanta in 1975 where he sat at the Table of St. Matthew.

In last year’s keynote address, Pastor Joe Nilsen asked us to think about Via de Cristo as not just about the experience of the weekends, but about the journey we are on. Today’s talk was about putting some skin on that skeleton that was presented. Pastor Al shared that it would be a cafeteria menu of nuggets to think about.

Streams of living water suggest that the witness ought to be refreshed, moving, and deep enough to be solidly reassuring, while also embracing challenge. It should provide as well some “take-homes” useful for our dual responsibilities of preparing others for both the “before-weekend” and “after-weekend” duties of our joint calling.

In preparing for his talk, Pastor Al shared some of his conversations with Jesus. We all know those conversations where sometimes we do too much talking and not enough listening. It is in the listening that we learn. Here are some of the nuggets shared. “Trust God for what has been given to us and we should trust what He wants us to do with it.” “We should try to please God and not worry about pleasing man.” “Trust God with the seeds He has provided us and He will reap the harvest.” “Trust God through the process.” Be dedicated to what God calls us to do, He can use our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. “Jesus is our friend.” “In our pow-wows, Jesus gives us “pows” and “wows.” There seems to be a common thread in those conversations “trust in God.”

Pastor Al challenged us. “Do we have a long term vision to make disciples?” Jesus called his disciples for 3 years not for a 3 day weekend. Jesus had a long term vision. Pastor Al shared, “If we in Via de Cristo are not in the disciple building business, we need to get out of the weekend business and

start over. The journey is not ending on Sunday, it continues on forever. We manage a journey, not just a weekend.”

Pastor Al shared many questions “How do we nourish what we are doing on the weekends. How do we reach people in our churches that are at different levels?” He asked us to think about the church today. Who is the church? Many mainline churches are in decline, does the same hold true for Via de Cristo? Do we need a new kind of realism to be adopted? America is no longer the same outward Christian nation we once were. Many list “none” as their religion.

“We need the power from on high, the living water, in order to persevere to do what we were called to do.” He describe it as “a bubbling spring of joy that pours over to bless others. Live close to Jesus, be open to what He wants to do, we shouldn’t try to control the streaming of the living water. It is a work of the Holy Spirit”

Pastor Al shared some other questions, “Do we need to do VDC differently? Who is the church? What about our younger generation? Where are they in our movement? What do they think about our churches?” Through research he found that they think we are “judgmental, more concerned about converts in order to survive, hypocritical, anti-gay, out of touch.” He also shared that “We don’t need to search for solutions or strategies, but wrestle with who we are. We can see the gift and the challenge of who we are in the VDC movement.”

Pastor Al shared “How do we handle this dilemma? How did Jesus manage to get people to the hillsides?” Pastor Al shared that our churches exist in a consumer culture. We compete with our culture that influences ourselves and others. In Jesus’ day, why did they come? Some were curious, some for food, some for hearings, some for teachings. He did not scold them, but He loved them.

Jesus also said “Go to give” to give what I have given you, go to give grace, the bread of life, waters of baptism. We need this transformation to be sent by the Holy Spirit. “How do we sell this in a consumer age?” Inventive ministries can draw a crowd. You can only change the people that you can “attract” from your sphere of influence.

Pastor Al shares “What is our take home from this dilemma? Come to Go. Come speaks to persons in our consumer age, it says we welcome you; we offer something that will bless you, we exist for you; a welcome with a mission consciousness. Two thirds of the word GOD is go. Are we willing to go for God’s enterprise? It takes time to change and transform people. The idol of consumerism is hard to break, we can’t stay at the getting phase.”

“Jesus says “Come with me”. This is the going of God’s ordaining. We can’t be serving without the Holy Spirit. We need to be repeatedly refreshed by God’s life giving water sent to renew the face of the earth. We need maturity.

Pastor Al concluded with "**Come to get** - get the whole world. **Go to give** - is a losing unsealable proposition in the consumer age. Giving becomes a way to get that life which is truly abundant. Both have errors and dangers. **Come to Go** - we are temples of the Holy Spirit, it draws us to seek reunion with God. We have to come to God to be replenished before we can go to be involved in apostolic action

In closing, Pastor Al shared 4 points:

1. Become as attractive to as many as possible. Hebrews 12:15 - no one fails to obtain the grace of God
2. Attract hospitably, we need to advertise well.
3. Capitulation to consumerism won't work-we can't sell out our mission.
4. Keeping a healthy tension in our "come to go" orientation best befits our status as a God inspired movement. Remember, we are aliens in a strange land, but are not yet in God's sufficient grace.

ORIENTATION: Carolyn Hawkins, NLS VP for Administration, welcomed nearly 180 attendees to NLSAM 2013 in the stately, beautiful DeSantis Family Chapel on the Palm Beach Atlantic University campus. Carolyn's welcome remarks focused on the key similarities and differences between local weekends and the national meeting, and the key purposes/planned activities of the 2013 meeting. She encouraged attendees to take best advantage of their time at NLSAM 2013 by opening their minds and hearts, filling them with love. "Get to know each other; put your whole self into this weekend", she encouraged. "God wants you to be here; find joy in the streams of living water flowing all around you." Carolyn emphasized the spirit of idealism, cooperation, and sharing that characterize our annual gatherings.

After reviewing this year's agenda, Carolyn provided an explanation of some key acronyms: NLS is the National Lutheran Secretariat, the governing body for local secretariats; EC is the NLS Executive Committee; HC is the Host Committee for this year's meeting, wearing royal blue aprons. NLSAM is the NLS Annual Meeting. Local volunteers are wearing royal blue T-shirts.

This is the 32nd national meeting; the first was held at an Atlanta, GA church with attendees staying in the homes of local members. Thirty-four of the Via de Cristo's 44 secretariats nation-wide are represented at this year's gathering, residing in 30 states.

Carolyn closed by emphasizing that we are eagerly anticipating a volunteer host for next year's 2014 annual meeting. She informed us that there will be dialogue sessions on Friday and Saturday, and that this year's group meetings will be more small-group focused rather than seminars. She closed by emphasizing several key 'rules' for this year's meeting:

THURSDAY - OPENING WORSHIP



The NLSAM 2013 began the afternoon gathering with worship. The theme for this weekend is found in John 7:37-39, "streams of living water will flow from within him. Janet Cunningham, music chair, and her musicians lead us in praise and glory to our Lord! One of Chris Tomlin's songs, *All My Fountains*, was used to help us focus on God's love that is running through each of us.

Worship and communion was led by Pastor Andy Hagen from Advent Lutheran in Boca Raton, Florida. Isaiah 44:2-4 and 52:7 were read along with our theme verse in John chapter 7. Pastor Dan McPherson, from Faith Lutheran in North Palm Beach, Florida, first instructed us in his sermon of the importance of water to our body. Our brain is set up to trigger our need for water and to seek it out when we become dehydrated. We only need to lose 8% of our body's water to suffer.

Then Pastor McPherson reminded us of the Bible having many examples of our need for water, both physical and spiritual. Moses was instructed to strike the rocks, and water flowed to quench the thirst of the Israelites for 40 years! God's awesome grace fed and nourished "His People".

In the spiritual sense we also need to take care of our thirst. Today Jesus is the "true rock" where rivers of living water flow out to each of us. Today that same living water flows to each of us to renew our souls. Our thirst never goes away and can be found when we are dehydrated in the gifts of the Holy Spirit; love, peace, joy, etc. The world still tries to quench our thirst and tempts us to take a drink that will take us away from God. Only Jesus can satisfy our thirst with living water.

Here is a simple test. Does what you do flow from Jesus and his word? When your thirst is satisfied, does it take you back to Christ? He is the only living water we need. Pastor Dan McPherson inspired us to take "living water" back to our communities. After communion, worship ended with the traditional song of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus".

- 1) Fill out evaluation forms 'as you go' rather than waiting until the conference is almost over.
- 2) No smoking, no alcohol on the PBAU campus
- 3) Lost room key or meal card; is a \$100 charge for each
- 4) Stay hydrated!!



FIRST TIMERS' PICTURE



EVENING VESPERS

Thursday evening Vespers were held in the DeSantis Family Chapel. Music worship was led by Janet Cunningham, of Gold Coast VdC, and her team of volunteer band members and chorus.

Lay Leader Katie Sistar, of Sonbeam VdC, Florida, read scripture from Titus 3:3-7 which reminded us that Jesus has saved us and poured out His Holy Spirit, and we have been justified

by His grace. A reading of Acts 3:19-20 told us we should repent and turn back so that our sins may be blotted out, and we may have times of refreshing in the presence of the Lord.

Worship concluded with Janet teaching us a new song, "Pray to Your Name" by Don Chapman and Adam Fisher, and we sang to Jesus "You are all I have and You are all I need....I will pray to You."



REMINDERS.....

- **VERY IMPORTANT: All dormitory rooms must be cleaned out and vacated by 9 am on Sunday Morning.** Palm Beach Atlantic University is hosting another large group immediately after ours. The host team will have a place to store luggage before final departure. Additional information about cleaning your room is in your notebooks.
- There is a **\$100.00** (lost key) and **\$100.00** (lost security pass) replacement charge. Please return these to registration before leaving West Palm Beach.
- Computer usage and internet access does not require a password: WIFI is “free”, select **PBAGuest** or **PBAStudent**.
- During our annual meeting, please turn off all cell phones and electronic devices. To honor our photographers work, please no flash photos during worship services.
- Palanca Posters are available to sign on the 2nd floor foyer of the Lassiter Student Center
- Palanca Chapel is also located on the 2nd floor of the Lassiter Student Center
- The host committee can be found wearing royal blue “cha” aprons or royal blue t-shirts.
- If your transportation plans change, please let the host committee know at registration.
- Golf carts are here to assist you in transportation between buildings.
- Please read through the valuable information in your notebooks.
- An offering will be received at the Saturday Morning Worship Service to support our Executive Director’s expenses. Checks can be written out to the NLS.

Don't forget to visit the NLS website:
www.viadecristo.org

Emergency Numbers:
Beverly Abt;
 954-815-4764
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 561-308-9438



Schedule for Friday, July 26, 2013			
Time	Event	Building	Location
6:45 a.m.	Breakfast	24 LSC	Dining Hall
8:15 a.m.	Worship	3 DFC	Chapel
9:30 a.m.	Living the Journey-small group	24	Weyenberg Center
11:15 a.m.	Business Meeting #2	18 MH	MacArthur 1291/1292
12:30 p.m.	Lunch	24 LSC	Dining Hall
1:30 p.m.	Sharing the Journey-small group	24	Weyenberg Center
3:00 p.m.	Dialogues	17 or 18	Rinker/MacArthur
4:00 p.m.	Business Meeting #3	18 MH	MacArthur 1291/1292
5:30 p.m.	Dinner	24 LSC	Dining Hall
6:45 p.m.	Regional Meeting #1	17 or 18	Rinker/MacArthur
8:00 p.m.	Evening Vespers	3 DFC	Chapel
	Fellowship & Hospitality	24 LSC	First Floor

3 =DFC - DeSantis Family Chapel; 24 =LSC - Lassiter Student Center; 18 =MH - MacArthur Hall

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CONEXIONES is the official publication of the National Lutheran Secretariat, a national association of the Via de Cristo (Way of Christ) movement, representing over 104,235 who have participated in 46 movements across the U.S. The purpose of this publication is to inform the delegates about the activities of the Annual Meeting.

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