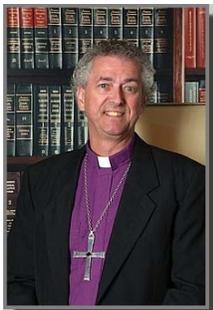




KEYNOTE: BISHOP RALPH DUNKIN

The Reverend Dr. Ralph Dunkin, Bishop of the West Virginia – Western Maryland Synod of the ELCA, began his Keynote Address by reading the scripture verse that is the theme of this gathering, Exodus 33:14: “God said, ‘My presence will go with you. I’ll see the journey to the end.’”



“I plan to focus on two of the words from that text: *presence* and *journey*, he said, “or you could say the contrast between *grace* and *response*.”

Dr. Dunkin described his childhood and struggles with school as a time that was very “works-righteous,” and remembered his parents saying, when his report card came out, “You can do better.” A life-long Lutheran, Rev. Dunkin says his childhood pastor used words he had to look up to understand; he did not hear about God’s grace until church camp in high school.

“If you remember nothing else,” he asked his audience, “hear the following: I offer to each and every one of you my heartfelt thanks for your work to renew the church, for that is what VdC is all about, the renewal of the whole church. I want you to take those words back to your communities your church, your pastors. When you teach of God’s grace, you also teach about God’s presence. What we call *walking wet* is a life response to the goodness of Jesus. You are about the ongoing reformation of the church.”

Grace comes as law and gospel—law that tells us how to live and points us to the need for a Savior, and the gospel that leads us to that Savior, he reminded.

Speaking about the means of grace, Dr. Dunkin said, “Baptism for a Lutheran is the gospel in miniature.” He explained that we prefer to baptize babies because when the child is carried forth to be baptized, the hands holding the child are lifted up toward God, in a position similar to the hands in communion, open to receive. Jesus promises to be present in baptism. He promises to be in Holy Communion.

Confession is another means of grace. In the confession we are forgiven. In the words of Jeremiah, the slate is wiped clean; our sins are forgiven and forgotten. (God forgives and forgets; we hang on.) Grace means not having the book thrown at us. Grace throws the book away. Dr. Dunkin described it, “You’re in a courtroom and you know you are guilty and the sentence the judge gives you is not guilty,” and he asks us to think “how would that transform us.”

As a side note, Dr. Dunkin commented that at a Cursillo® weekend, he was taught that sharing the peace meant “the Christ in me embraces the Christ in you.” Where once Lutherans refrained from embracing, now, he says, we have gone too far the other way, using the time of sharing the peace to chat about

other things. “Are we sharing the peace of Christ,” he asked, “or sharing a piece of us?”

“Presence,” he continued. “From the earliest scripture the word *presence* was to alert us that we are never alone or abandoned by God.”

Christ promises to be with us in different ways. Matt. 18 talks about church conflict or individual conflict: “Where two or three of you are gathered in my name, I am there with you.” Dr. Dunkin noted that many people think that means where we are gathered to worship, but he believes it means that Christ is present in the midst of our conflicts. “If we realize that in our churches, wouldn’t our conflicts be different? We act like if Christ isn’t there, we can win the day.” “But how do you defend God?” he asked. “The same way you defend a lion – you get out of His way.” We need to stop trying to lead God, and learn to follow Him. “Where is Jesus? In Gaza? At the border crossing with the children? In Congress? Where is He leading us?”

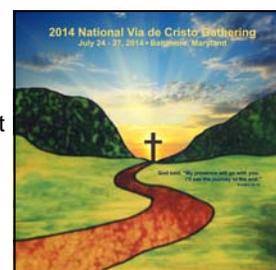
When Dr. Dunkin became a Spiritual Director in what was then called the Cursillo® Movement, he read the Catholic Cursillo® manual. It said: *You are to be taking leaders to a weekend. When your congregation stops having leaders to send, you stop having weekends.* He created a five-page document, which he read to the Ultreya community before they formed teams for a weekend. It listed the jobs in order of importance, describing what each position does, with the Spiritual Directors at the bottom, just below the professors. He argued that if the only reason for doing weekends is for the “warm fuzzes” for the team, we should stop doing them.

“The journey is our response to the good news of Jesus,” he commented. “In that journey I want to give you a challenge.” Much of this program comes from the monastic orders of the Catholic Church. “What if we made it more Lutheran?” he asked, and made it “more about discipleship than about piety.” He quoted Bishop Nicholas as saying, “If you meet Jesus face to face, you’re going the wrong way.” Dr. Dunkin continued, “My challenge to you is, all those talks about piety—we change them to the seven marks of discipleship.”

The mnemonic to remember the seven marks of discipleship is **PIGS SEW:**

- Prayer
- Inviting or being inviting
- Gracious living
- Stewardship
- Serving our Neighbors
- Evangelism
- Worship

“The good news about Jesus is about reconciliation, Dr. Dunkin concluded. “*His presence is with us, and He is along for the journey.*”



ORIENTATION: Carolyn Hawkins, NLS VP for Administration, used the familiar words, "Come, Holy Spirit . . ." participants at the 2014 National Lutheran Secretariat Annual Gathering opened the first official activity, the Orientation.

Carolyn went on to explain that this whole weekend is about encouragement. She stated the three key purposes of the weekend:

- for delegates to conduct the business of the national secretariat
- through dialog sessions, informal meetings, and other opportunities to learn how other secretariats are successful and share your secretariat's successes and struggles
- to make certain that we are holding true to the basic essentials of the Via de Cristo movement (daily communion, prayer chapel and spiritual direction) and at the same time set a vision for the future.

Echoing words from the VdC weekend, Carolyn said, "Open your mind and heart to this experience. Set aside any preconceived ideas and expectations you have for this weekend. Take in as much as you can this weekend; in the end you will see that everything comes together." She also asked for a spirit of idealism, cooperation and charity, adding, "When you put your whole self into this weekend you will take away from it what God wants you to take away from it."

Carolyn shared a brief history of the National Gathering and the following acronyms;

NLS = National Lutheran Secretariat,

NLSEC = National Lutheran Secretariat Executive Committee

NLSAM = National Lutheran Secretariat Annual Meeting, the former name of this event; this is the first *Annual Gathering*.

HC = Host Committee, people wearing red aprons; here to assist you with your needs.

The notebook contains a lot of valuable information including the schedule and locations for each event along with a map. Business meetings will be in Lecture Hall 1; Meals at *True Grits* (including gluten free); worship and keynote in Meyerhoff 030; forums on third floor of building E in the university center; early morning coffee in Harbor Hall plus fellowship and hospitality (weather permitting) in the Harbor Hall courtyard.

Each of the first three forums will be a brief witness talk by a lay person. This will be followed by small group discussions; like a large Rollo room, complete with round tables. Each table will have a picture and a number. On the back of each participant's nametag is a sticker with a picture and a number. Participants should sit at the table with the matching picture and number. At a fourth forum time for small group discussion on Saturday after lunch, each person will be asked to share with others at the table a 3-4 minute mini-talk about something he or she found meaningful in the Via de Cristo walk.

On the same floor as the forums, next to the ballroom, are the vendors; people who sell Via de Cristo crosses and other merchandise, as well as the NLS distribution center materials.

Buildings F G H (the math/psychology building, information technology building and Sherman hall) will be the locations for dialog sessions and regional meetings. All are listed in the notebook, including a list of participants that indicates which region each is from and which small group each will be part of. Partici-



pants should each decide which dialog sessions to attend and jot the name and room number in the blanks on the schedule. There will be one dialog session and one regional meeting on Friday afternoon, and another of each on Saturday afternoon.

In Harbor Hall there is a room for palanca posters and a prayer chapel. The palanca posters are sent to other secretariats to use on their weekends. Please take time to pray for each community and its weekends while signing the posters. Although only some of the posters are available now, ultimately there will be 88 of them, so most people will not be able to sign all of them in one session. Signing the name in the same area on each poster can help a person to see which he or she has signed and locate the ones that still need a signature.

Everyone is encouraged to spend time in the chapel for individual prayer. The host committee has placed cards around the campus that say SFJTD - *Something for Jesus to Do*. These are prayer request cards. There are baskets to collect the completed cards. Banners from home secretariats should be taken to the chapel for display. Don't forget to pick them up again Saturday evening, along with the prayer posters for your secretariat.

Newsletters are available every day in registration area, at business meetings and in some other rooms where everyone will be gathering.

Additional notebook information;

- There is a note card in each notebook This is to leave message to executive committee concerning any kind of feedback or subject about which you want to talk, etc.
- The color cards are to be used for business meetings, to help guide discussion to balance those speaking in favor (green) or against it (red).
- There is a page that talks about where we've been and where we're going. Next summer's gathering will be in Rock Island, IL. We are looking for people to host future gatherings. If you are interested in hosting in 2017, please give it prayerful consideration. There will be a dialog session about hosting a national gathering on Saturday.
- When participants start talking to people from other areas, they quickly learn that different communities call things by different names, so each secretariat will get a sheet asking "what do you call this," and this information will be compiled and shared for you to add to your notebook.

Campus logistics:

- Smoking **ONLY** in area labeled S on your map; fine of \$60 for non-compliance.
- If you need any kind of office support (printer, check email, etc.), an office is available in 163 on the first floor of Harbor Hall. There are computers and printers set up in registration area, especially for people who need to print boarding passes.
- We have four golf carts on campus. If you are able to walk, please do so to reserve the golf carts for those who need them, so everyone can be on time.
- The campus bookstore is in the Commons building. It is open Thursday and Friday from 8:30 to 4:00.
- Lastly, review reminders on the page 4 and stay hydrated!



THURSDAY OPENING WORSHIP

The Rev. Lee Brumback, pastor of St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Charles Town, WV, Rainbow VdC

“A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away,” the Rev. Lee Brumback of the Rainbow VdC community and pastor of St. Thomas Lutheran Church in Charles Town, WV, began the opening worship service on Thursday, July 24, as he launched into a story from his youth.



When Pr. Brumback was in middle school, he enjoyed playing saxophone, so he thought he would try marching band in high school. However, after a summer of band camp and practice, he determined that he did not care for the band director, who pushed the students to excel. The week before school started, he announced to his parents that he was quitting band. His father pointed out that he had made a commitment to the season, that the field drills had been written with him in the formation, and that it would not be fair to the other students involved if he should drop out at that point. If he still didn't like band by the end of the season, he could drop out then.

It turned out to be an awesome year. The band won competitions, and Pr. Brunback learned to respect the director for his expectations. He learned lessons of sacrifice, commitment and teamwork.

Sometimes we are not sure what we are getting into. Sometimes we find ourselves in over our heads. Life is a journey, and God promises to see the journey to the end.

In the Gospel, Jesus makes it clear what we are getting into if we follow Him: It's really hard, perhaps dangerous. It can cost us friends, family, possessions, even our life. It can take us places and in the company of people we don't want to be around those who are sick or dying, those on the margins of society.

This is not the message we hear in our culture or in pop Christianity. Some people believe if you are a Christian, nothing bad will happen to you. Luther said that is the difference between theology of glory and theology of the Cross. We believe in the theology of the cross. But God promises, “My presence will go with you. I will see the journey to the end.”

Pr. Brumback reminded us that, “we are followers of Jesus and disciples of Jesus every day, every hour, every place, and discipleship is a journey. If we are followers of Jesus, we will find ourselves in places and doing things we never imagined.”

Jesus invites his followers to count the cost of discipleship. Yes it is hard, but it's not about that. It's about setting out on a journey and we journey with our brothers and sisters in Christ, a journey guided by the Holy Spirit. plus God promises, “My presence will go with you. I will see the journey to the end.”

Business Meeting #1 Highlights

Ed Broestl, President, welcomed everyone to the 2014 National Gathering. He asked the “first timers” to stand and be welcomed, followed by those who had been at 5 or more meetings. The intent was to have the first time people see who was available to talk to that had experience.

Ed shared that our focus this weekend was to be encouraged. We all need to be “encouraged by God to do the work we do when we leave this place.” Pastor Paul Schmidlin, interim S.D., offered a prayer for the National Gathering.

Ed went on to make introductions of the Board (elected and appointed positions). He shared that Thrivent was unable to be present today and gave us a brief description of what Thrivent does and what they have done for the National Gathering.

The meeting was called to order and the seating of the delegates began. After seating delegates, the topic turned to Voting Rights. A motion was made to expand the rules / NLS by-laws to allow all regional coordinators and appointed positions of the executive committee to have voting privileges. Discussion ensued, the question was called and the vote was taken by ballot. The motion was defeated 84 to 4.

Ed continued with old business emphasizing the Executive Director position and New Business regarding a Pastoral Presentation, vision casting and the 2015 Gathering.

Nancy Petersen reported the Constitution & By-laws updates as 34 Secretariats responded and were approved & ratified. However, ALL Secretariats need to send in their Constitutions to be reviewed to make sure there are no discrepancies between the Secretariat and NLS Constitutions so that issues can be resolved. Many of these issues threaten non-profit status and break I.R.S. rules. The review is for the Secretariats' benefit and for affiliation with the NLS.

The election process was explained. Spiritual Director, Vice President of Administration and Treasurer are all open positions this year and nominations from the floor will be accepted on Friday. Please remember all the Executive Committee reports are in written form in the book.

Remember, ENCOURAGE. ENCOURAGEMENT for the journey... ENCOURAGE others on the journey... ENCOURAGE others TO the journey.

Vespers – Thursday evening

If you love to sing and to Praise the Lord the place to be was at Vespers. The service used was Holden Evening Prayer, setting by Marty Haugen. Martha Moore from Vineyard was the cantor and Pastor Diane LaFauci, Journey of Faith, read the scripture and prayers. The Music team also assisted with the music led by John Marlow on the keyboard. The service In its entirety was one of Praising the Lord. The blessing in song sums up the service.

Leader: “Let us bless our God praise All: peace and thanks to you Leader: May God, creator bless us and keep us, may Christ be ever light for our lives, may the Spirit of Love be our guide and path, for all our days. Amen”



**2014
WORSHIP
TEAM**

REMINDERS.....

- There is a **\$400.00** (lost key) and **\$25.00** (swipe card) replacement charge. The swipe card will get you into the the building.
- Transportation: Golf carts are available to assist you between scheduled events. If you can't find one, call our transportation chair, Steven Gielda; 703-927-4443
- Internet Connection: Harbor Hall and the campus are wi-fi equipped and network cable jacks are in each room. Use the UMBC Visitor network - NO password is required. It is an unsecured site and the signal strength varies from place to place on campus.
- Smoking: ONLY in the Park Road Smoking area and ask a host team member if you need help getting there. There is a strictly enforced \$60 fine if you are caught smoking elsewhere.
- During all meetings and worship services, please turn off all cell phones and electronic devices plus no flash photos during worship services.
- Palanca Posters are available to sign on the 1st floor of Harbor Hall, look for the signs
- Palanca Chapel is also located on the 1st floor of Harbor Hall, look for the signs
- If your transportation plans change, please let the host committee know.
- Medical Concerns: We have two host members with a nursing back ground for minor questions. Marilyn Ayres (301-514-5309) and Sylvia Schrader (717-261-7827).
- Medical Emergencies: Call Campus Police at: 410-455-5555 and they will call 911.
- An offering will be received at the Saturday Morning Worship Service. Checks can be written out to the **NLS**. Funds received in this offering will be used for Outreach.

Emergency Numbers:
Mark Carson;
410-456-5146
 Campus Police:
410-455-5555
 or
410-455-3133



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



Schedule for Friday, July 25, 2014			
Time	Event	Building	Location
7:00 a.m.	Breakfast	B	True Grits
8:15 a.m.	Worship	C	Meyerhoff 030
9:30 a.m.	Encouraged for the Journey Small Group	E	University Cntr Ballroom
10:45 a.m.	Business Meeting #2	D	Lecture Hall
12:15 p.m.	Lunch	B	True Grits
1:30 p.m.	Encouraging others on the Journey	E	University Cntr Ballroom
3:00 p.m.	Dialogues (see notebook)	---	(see notebook)
4:00 p.m.	Business Meeting #3	D	Lecture Hall
5:30 p.m.	Dinner Vespers	B	True Grits
7:00 p.m.	Regional Meeting #1	---	(see notebook)
8:00 p.m.	Evening Vespers Fellowship & Hospitality	C A	Meyerhoff 030 Harbor Hall Court Yard

**2014 First Timers
to the NLS Gathering**



Vol. 22.2 Friday July 25, 2014

CONEXIONES is the official publication of the National Lutheran Secretariat, a national association of the Via de Cristo (Way of Christ) movement, representing over 108,036 who have participated in 47 movements across the U.S. The purpose of this publication is to inform the delegates about the activities of the Annual Meeting.

Conexiones Editor:
 Judy Laabs-Foss
 4495 Margaret Street
 St. Paul, MN 55110
 651/429-6762
jer2911@comcast.net