

(Student) Pastor's Annual Report – Feb. 12, 2021

It should be stated right off the top, that I can really only report accurately since my arrival as an NALC intern June 1, 2020.

The NALC helped to arrange this internship while partnering with Concordia Lutheran Seminary in Edmonton. Under the internship agreement, I (Darcy Albers) would serve from June 2020 to May 2021, with Rev. Dr. Kebede Dibaba from Peace Lutheran Church in Fort St. John serving as a supervising pastor. Under ideal circumstances, an internship takes place under a pastor working in his own congregation, but sometimes interns have been asked to fill vacancies. Because of this, it was arranged that Rev. Kebede would also be available to provide communion once a month, as he would exchange services with the intern, since the intern is not permitted to administer baptism or communion prior to ordination. Fortunately, some leeway was agreed upon in that the intern could provide communion to shut-ins from pre-consecrated elements. Also, since normally an intern would not be preaching every Sunday, the council, under recommendation from the internship committee, decided to bring in guest preachers once a month in order to give the intern time off from sermon preparation to focus on other aspects of the internship.

Of course, as we read in Proverbs 16:9, “A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.” COVID and the subsequent government restrictions changed the way in which this internship might have been envisioned. I had a phone call with a member of the NALC head office before I came up here in which I asked, “In light of this pandemic, is this really the time to start an internship?” The wise pastor replied, “Darcy, no one knows what they are doing right now. You might as well learn alongside us.” Well, learn I have! In many ways it feels that the learning curve has been pretty steep, yet I remain grateful for this opportunity. The greatest encouragement of course comes from the fact that our Lord, his grace, and his word, do not change. In easy times or tough, with a seasoned pastor or a fresh intern, through the ups and down of this so quickly changing world, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. While of course it is painful to see people going through a difficult time, it is a joy to see God at work in all circumstances.

As I prepare to finish my own education as well as reflecting on what it means to be a pastor in these times, I have reflected on the ordination vows which read, “*Will you be diligent in your study of the Holy Scriptures and in the use of the means of grace? Will you pray for God’s people, nourish them with the Word and Holy Sacraments, and lead them by your example of faithful service and holy living?*” When there has been so much going on to distract and capture our attention, I have found this a helpful tool to help focus on the foundations of pastoral ministry, not just in this time, but all times. I have considered it a privilege and honor to preach to and pray for this congregation.

A special word of appreciation should be given to everyone who helped to get our services online. I have had many conversations from people who have not been able to attend services about just how meaningful this online connection has been. One of the exciting things which has come from the online services has been the engagement of people who might not

normally attend services. There is a great deal of hope that comes from knowing that the Word is being planted far and wide. However, there is a unique challenge in this as well, as we try to engage these people into the life of the church in a meaningful way. For now, prayer may be our most effective tool. As time goes on, consideration should be given as to how best to minister to this online community which we never would have guessed would exist a year ago.

I was very happy that Valhalla Lutheran Church was willing to bring in a pastoral candidate to serve as an intern. Bringing in a new pastor can be difficult enough, but the decision to bring in a student is an extra step of faith. While COVID and government restrictions have been a frustrating challenge at several levels, I and my family have been deeply touched by the kindness and hospitality that has been expressed by many. One of the concerns I had about this year was whether or not I would have opportunities to build relationships or to get to know people in the congregation well. I did not expect to build so many meaningful friendships so quickly!

I read once that one of the great evils of this pandemic is that it attacks us at one of our most human points, namely, our connections to one another. I hope that one of the lessons we take from this time is just how valuable the community of the church is. Of course, simply being in the same physical space together does not necessarily mean we are truly in community. I hope that as Valhalla Lutheran Church moves forward, this community truly grows in love and understanding as we gather around God's great gifts of Word and Sacrament, as well as caring for one another in Christian love.

Records of Note

Records of baptisms, marriages and new memberships are noted in the original version of this report but have been deleted for the online version.

Submitted in faith and hope,

Student Pastor Darcy Albers