

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is Risen! Risen Indeed! Welcome to the 2021 NALC Ohio Mission Region Convocation. As you know, the past year has been one of great challenge, but also great opportunity. Our congregations have found innovative ways to proclaim the Gospel beyond their walls, towns, and cities - and across the world wide web. The message of reconciliation in Christ has been proclaimed well and broadly in the midst of great political and racial upheaval. In this year of great uncertainty, Jesus has been lifted up as our sure and certain hope. Our congregations have modeled what it can look like to love even those with whom we disagree - not perfectly, but as the Holy Spirit grants us grace and power. The Pastoral Care and Transition Team found ways to help congregations in transition address conflict, engage the call process, and call pastors in the midst of a global pandemic. We also welcome a new congregation, Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Letart, West Virginia, which is now part of the Southeast Ohio Mission District.

Also, the work of the Ohio Mission Region has continued. Though our Executive Council met online instead of in-person, new initiatives were begun, including the development of a vision to appoint a regional Mission Team that will resource congregations taking next steps in outreach and discipleship. A job description for this team was developed by former Southeast Ohio Dean Mark Daniels, Executive Council member Jack Walker and me, as follows:

“Mission: The congregations and districts of the Ohio Mission Region (OMR) seek to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ through Word and Sacrament with as many people as possible.

To that end, the OMR Mission Team will provide support and resources to congregations, pastors, and districts in helping them to pursue this mission in two major ways.

1. Engage in intentional prayer focused on the mission. Prayer emphases, developed by the team, will focus on all the Baptized living out our call to discipleship every day. Everyone will be encouraged to pray: for the unbaptized in their circle of acquaintances; for the baptized now gone astray; and, as Jesus tells us to pray, for workers to go into the harvest: disciples prepared give an account for the hope they have through Jesus (1 Peter 3:15). Although some programming may emerge from this, we believe that the Church in intentional prayer for faithfulness to Christ’s great commission will find God opening up personal relationships through which individual disciples and groups of disciples will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to make new disciples. This was clearly the strategy of the Church in Acts.

2. Be intentional about making disciples. In our established congregations, this will begin with all our pastors being intentionally engaged in discipleship through a

relationship with one of the NALC discipleship guides. It will also mean pastors and other mature disciples in each congregation establishing small discipleship groups which regularly gather around God's Word and support one another in daily personal times in the Word. It will entail pastors, congregations, and districts supporting and coaching small groups of interested people who are not part of our congregations and immediate communities who are interested in gathering around God's Word and keeping daily quiet times with God. These groups may be interested in forming into house churches. They may be interested in becoming satellites of established congregations. The pursuit of the mission Jesus has given to us (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23; and Acts 1:4-8) may call us to be less institutional in our approach and more personal, more open to the Holy Spirit."

The team will provide support to congregations, pastors, deans, and districts with a passion and vision for the mission. The next step is to appoint 5-6 people to serve as the Mission Team for Ohio. If you would like to nominate yourself or someone else to be on the team, please email me at jmorlock@ualc.org. Our theme for this convocation is "*Walking With The Holy Spirit*". May we be empowered to keep in step with the Spirit in this year of 2021, neither lagging behind nor rushing ahead, but joyfully joining God in His work wherever He calls us!

Easter Joy and Peace,

Pastor Jeff Morlock,
Convener of Ohio Mission Region Council,
Dean of Southeast Ohio Mission District

