

COME AND CELEBRATE

This year NAAC will be gathering for its TENTH year of annual events and we want YOU there to help us celebrate. The conference will take place in Niagara Falls, Canada from July 20th through July 23rd, 2006.

On Saturday night during the conference we will host a special banquet dinner led by Rev. Roger Prehn who will help us have a fun look back at NAAC over the years since its birth to the present time.

During this event, we will be focus on the stages and rites of the catechumenate process and how we can develop this ministry in various parish situations and national church endeavors. At three different times, we will be-

gin by observing the rites of welcome, the Lenten scrutinies, and baptism, led by our liturgist, Rev. Barbara Berry-Bailey who works in the ELCA Office of Worship.

At the conclusion of each rite we will gather into small groups for discussion on what we observed and how we might apply the rites to our personal and congregational settings. Then there will be talks by our keynote speaker, Rev. Maxwell Johnson, noted scholar, author, and professor of liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Johnson will reflect on each particular stage and rite in the catechumenal process.

Three fabulous workshop op-

portunities will be available to everyone throughout the gathering, covering various topics aimed at involving everyone at the conference. This includes those fairly new to the process as well as those who have been part of catechumenal ministry for many years.

So, whether you are hearing about NAAC for the first time or if you have been part of the growth of this organization over the years, this conference has been created with YOU in mind.

Please come and help us celebrate.

Shirley Griffin
NAAC President

SPEAKER — A MAN OF SURPRISING TALENTS

The Rev. Maxwell E. Johnson, Ph. D., is Professor of Liturgical Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He has recently edited a new breviary of daily prayer based on Benedictine spirituality. Dr. Johnson is the editor and writer of several publications and essays, including his seminal work, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (The Liturgical Press). His many publications also include *Living Water*,

Sealing Spirit: Readings on Christian Initiation and Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy: Revised and Expanded Edition.

In contrast, Maxwell is a member of The Oblates of Blues, a blues group formed at the School of Theology, Saint John's Abbey and University, Collegeville, MN.

Most of the members of the band are graduate students in liturgy and theology. The name derives from the term used for a

lay or clerical associate member of a Benedictine monastic community. The Oblates keep up their apostolate of spreading the message of Chicago Blues to all who will receive it.



REFLECTIONS ON PASCHAL MYSTERY

With our cell phones, PDA's and day-planners, our lap-tops, beepers and other devices, it's so easy for us to believe that we are in control of our lives, and that with this control over our destiny, we find peace, happiness, and fulfillment. What utter nonsense!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ tells us that just the opposite is true. It is the act of surrendering ourselves to God that we find what we most seek. Is this not the message of the cross?

As the church, we are called to live in the paradox and the "foolishness" of the cross. We proclaim, with changed lives, that the same One who raised Christ from the dead is at work in our lives as well, prompting us to empty ourselves of ourselves to the point we fall on our knees with a basin and towel, and with tear-streaked faces, wash each other's feet, embracing each other just as we embrace the cross of Christ.

The cross calls us to die as the way of fullness of life; it is the pattern of our dying with Christ. To die to success as judged by the world's standards, to die to the need for self-preservation as an institutional church, so that a community of faith can flourish and we can live the radical message of the Cross no matter the cost. The cross is the pattern for our dying too, not just for Christ.

To our middle-class North American value system, the message of the cross may be nonsense. You won't get rich. You won't always be popular. There's no guarantee for security. Yet we say, as followers of Christ, that the

way of the cross is the way to life in its fullness, not just in the life to come, but in the here and now. That's what the paschal mystery is all about.

We, who are foolish enough to die to ourselves and risk everything to live the gospel message of peace, justice, and compassion, will find that same power that raised Christ is at work in our lives too; for in our baptism we have been joined to Christ's death and so joined to Christ's resurrection. The cross is not only the sign of God's saving activity in Christ's life once long ago, but a sign of God's power in our lives today, to save us, to transform us, to raise us with Christ. The cross is the pattern of our dying then and the reason for our living.

So, as the church, we choose the unpopular causes that scandalize the world. We seek out those people whose lives the world considers scandalous, lost, worthless, undesirable, unnecessary, because God sought us out and has chosen to call us the children of God even when we did not know God; and God still seeks for us even when we turn our backs on God.

This is why we follow the cross in procession and revere it (especially on Good Friday). This is why we continue to mark our buildings with this radical sign and mark our bodies with it, just as our Lord's body was marked with the "sign of the cross." In our baptism, we have died with Christ in the certainty that we will be raised with Christ.

Being "church" means that

every year, whether we want it or not, whether we are ready or not, a day called "Ash" Wednesday rolls around and we must enter a forty day period called "Lent." These days of hard teaching prepare us to stand on the brink of the Triduum and the cross of Jesus Christ.

We spend Lent getting rid of, giving up, "putting to death," all that stands between us and our being able to stand with Christ before the cross, and saying: "Into your hands I commend my spirit." As we read in Philippians, we prepare to "let his mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus who emptied himself to the point of death, even death on the cross," so that we can then enter our great Fifty Day Easter time as a new people.

So despite all the technological advances of this modern age, the calling to us is the same as it was to the followers of Christ some 2000 years ago. We are called to be faithful people of God by surrendering our lives to God that we might live. We are the church. In our baptism we became the Body of Christ. Let us continue to be faithful to the God who saves. Let us throw everything to the wind: our pretensions about ourselves, our need for control over ourselves and others, and our sin. Let us then trust God and embrace the Cross of Jesus the Christ.

You will find what you most seek.

Your brother in Christ,
Rev. Canon Steve Harnadek
NAAC Secretary

RECOMMENDED

Entering the Household of God: Taking Baptism Seriously in a Post-Christian Society by Claudia



A. Dickson, Church Publishing Incorporated, 2002. This wonderful book presents a basic history of baptismal practices as well as suggested plans for study sessions for catechumens, parents and sponsors of candidates, and those preparing to renew their baptismal vows. Dickson, Associate Rector at St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, has written a compelling and cogent book on baptism as the sacrament of belonging to God and becoming a disciple of

Jesus.

The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation by Edward Yarnold, S.J., The Liturgical Press, 1994. This book is an excellent way to prepare for this summer's NAAC Conference theme. Yarnold guides the reader on an historical tour through the rites of initiation in the fourth century and includes fourth century baptismal homilies from Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose, John Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuetia.

NEW ON THE WEBSITE

During the past year the Reformed Church in America has published *Companions on the Way: A Guide for Elders as They Tend to the Spiritual Needs of People Exploring or Rediscovering the Christian Faith*. The links to this publication are available

on the homepage of the NAAC website. Contents include a devotional guide for those seeking or reaffirming baptism, sections on welcoming, journeying with, and sending new Christians to serve. In only forty-four pages, the process of the catechumenate is

presented in a helpful and very accessible way. A hands-on book!



THE FIFTY DAYS OF EASTER

We now enter into that time in the catechumenate devoted to reflection and teaching upon Baptismal Living. The Fifty Days of Easter aims at focusing on life in Christ for the newly baptized and those who have affirmed their baptism. We continue to explore the habits of faith we have learned and practiced during the catechumenate and explore our spiritual gifts. These Fifty Days of Easter are a call to appropriate Ministry in Daily Life. The ancient term for this period is "Mystagogy." By "studying the mysteries," exploring the depths of baptism and Eucharist, we learn how we might live as a new creation. Please check the NAAC Website for resources during the Fifty Days of Easter. Here are a few worth mentioning: *Mystagogy: After Baptism — Shaping the Christian Life* by John P. Burgess, Louisville, Presbyterian

ing Corporation, 2005.

Experiencing Mystagogy: The Sacred Pause of Easter by Gerard F. Baumbach, Paulist Press, 1996.

■ "Baptism certainly marks a change in us, but it does not end there. We don't emerge from the water fully formed, with it all put together. It wasn't even that way for Jesus. His struggles continued long after he left the Jordan River. Our experience of baptism is a change of heart that must become a way of life." — Klara Tammany

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