

STAFF REPORTS

2018 Synod Assembly Report of the Bishop's Associate for Leadership Formation and Congregational Care The Rev. Kris Totzke



This has been a very active year in the NT-NL Synod. I can no longer claim the “new” status, but there is still learning going on for me in this position. Thankfully, the learning experiences have been positive. I am grateful for the

diversity of experiences that are part of this call, and even more grateful for the welcome and hospitality I have received throughout the synod.

Candidacy has been one of our more active areas. We went from thirteen active candidates for ministry to seventeen. Just as last year, most of them are non-traditional students from a variety of backgrounds and contexts. We continue to find new ways to seek out pastors here in our context. Eight of those current candidates are TEEM students (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries.) These are the non-traditional students who are called to lead specific ministries that are often hard to fill. This has often been the path for our ethnic specific communities, but it has also become more common in our rural communities and for students who have a tremendous amount of ministry and life experience. We also have students attending Brite Divinity School and affiliating with ELCA seminaries for their Lutheran learning components, while some are doing Distributive (distance) Learning programs with our ELCA seminaries. While this does fill many of our needs, we still need to work to identify more of our young adults who are called to ministry and learning in a traditional seminary setting. Only three of our seventeen

fall into that category at this time. The good news is, I have met with several people who are interested in ministry and had conversations with pastors about others they have identified who are gifted for ministry. I anticipate that next year our list will be just as long, even with several current candidates nearing completion in the coming year.

Mobility is another big portion of my call. If you are the type who looks back at old reports, you may notice the In/Out/Change report for this year is much longer. We’ve had six new pastors move into NT-NL. There has been more movement this year and will likely be more in the coming year as well. We’ve had nine retirements since last year’s assembly (although two of those pastors continue to serve their congregations in contract roles.) More pastors are anticipating retirement. While this gives me a bigger pool of pastors to call on for interim ministry sites, it also is a challenge as we have more congregations in the process of self-discernment and call.

Some of those congregations are dealing with the issues of falling numbers and decreasing budgets, which leads to the question of their ability to call a full-time pastor. That’s a hard reality to face but one that has been pushing us to look at new opportunities. I say opportunity because I think this can be a great way to think about staffing for growth rather than viewing it as a way to avoid death. Conversations have begun with congregations around the possibilities for cooperative ministry and what that can look like in their settings.

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We also have a brand-new batch of first call pastors in our group for **First Call Theological Education**. Three are newly ordained, one is coming from another tradition to the ELCA, and another is awaiting call. The ELCA requires that all first call pastors continue their education and development for three years. We work together with the other two Texas synods for some of that work, while some is done independently within NT-NL. We have also begun to refer to this as First Call Accompaniment because the goal is more about accompanying the new pastors for support and growth than it is about continued theological training.

Travel continues to be a big factor in this call. I have continued to discover wonderful things about the region but even more so about our many congregations. The best way for me to get to know the congregations and the people I serve is to get out and visit. Please continue to invite me, so I can discover more of NT-NL. I am blessed to be called to serve in the ELCA and specifically here in NT-NL. I am blessed to work with such a tremendous synod staff under the leadership of a gifted Bishop. I am *really* blessed to know so many of you now here in the synod. Thank you for allowing me to continue to do this ministry here, even as I continue to learn.