

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.

PART D

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.

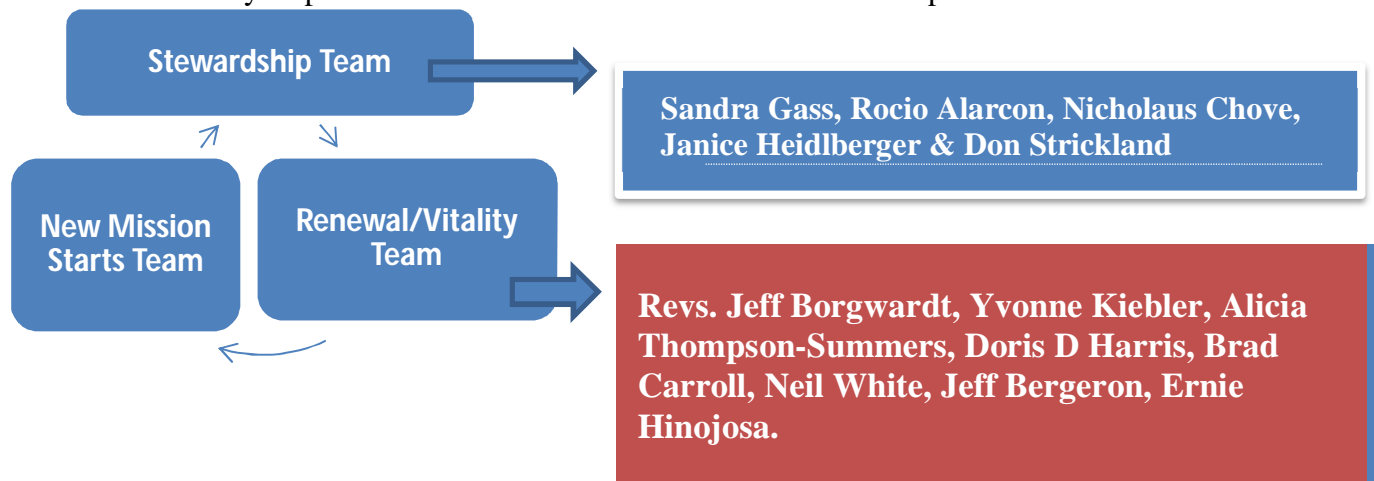
Travel continues to be a big factor in this call. I have continued to discover wonderful things about the region but even more so about our many congregations. The best way for me to get to know the congregations and the people I serve is to get out and visit. Please continue to invite me, so I can discover 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.



Report to the Northern Texas – Northern Louisiana Synod Assembly April 27-28, 2018 Rev. Irma Banales: Director for Evangelical Mission

Dear members of the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, ELCA; 2017 has been a year of joyful moments and challenging times as well. But I believe I am not alone in this call; [John 15:16](#) ¹⁶*You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear first-fruit that will last and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.* God has given us 106 congregations, a Bishop, and a council of leaders with many gifts to be In Mission Together.

Some of my responsibilities as a DEM are to lead three leadership tables:



8 new mission starts; led by Mission Developers lay and Clergy

1. Mision San Mateo, Waco TX
Meeting at St Matthew, Waco TX
2. Iglesia Luterana Adviento, Arlington TX
meeting at Advent, Arlington TX
3. Umoja International Church, Ft Worth TX
Meeting at King of Glory, Ft Worth TX
4. Church of the Damascus Road,
Weatherford TX. Various places
5. Kyrie Mission Pub Church,
Meeting at Chimera Brewing Com.
6. Umoja International Church, Dallas
Meeting at King of Glory, Dallas
7. Dallas Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church
Meeting at St. Luke's Richardson TX
8. Indonesian Lutheran Church Gethsemane
Meeting at Christ the Servant, Allen TX



5 Congregations under development

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Iglesia Luterana San Gabriel, Alvarado TX Rev. Jesus Escamilla+ Iglesia Luterana Santa Maria de Guadalupe, Irving TX Rev. Gus Vinajeras+ First Sagrada Familia Lutheran Church, Garland TX SAWL: Angel Villalobos+ Emanuel Lutheran Church, Dallas TX Rev. Cindy Carroll+ First Lutheran Church, Waco TX; SAWL: Austin Nickel
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In partnership with Ecumenical churches:

- + Louisiana Interchurch Conference Board, representing the NT-NL Synod.
- + Peru for a Reformation Celebration. Methodist, Episcopalian, United Church of Christ, and Lutherans. Visited a couple of Lutheran churches in the country.
- + Church United in Christ Community for a Unity Worship Service.
- + REDIL: Ecumenical Network to Develop the Latino Churches: Presbyterians, Episcopalians, United Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, United Methodist, and Lutherans.

Participation:

- + “Latino Leadership Initiative” four synods: Texas Louisiana Gulf Coast, Southwestern, Northern Texas- Northern Louisiana, and Oklahoma/Kansas synods are part of this initiative in partnership with Rev. Ruben Duran Director for New Mission Starts and the two Presidents Louise N. Johnson from Wartburg Seminary and Jim Nieman from Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.
 - + Tulsa, OK. Workshop Latino Christian Education for Children.
20 of us from our Synod participated.
 - + ELCA Latino Strategy Team. Planning Team: Spanish Coaching.
 - + ELCA Mission Developers/Redevelopers planning Team.
 - + ELCA Stewardship Team
 - + ELCA “Future Directions Table”

Consultations/Meetings:

- + Visited several congregations for conversations about the future of their ministry.
- + Monthly meetings with Mission Developers and Redevelopers in our Synod.
- + The *three African American* Congregations in our synod: Mount Olive, Dallas, St John, Dallas and Community of Hope, Ft Worth, have welcomed me to be part of their partnership and unity
- + Preaching and Sharing the Gospel in several NT-NL Churches.



Thank You to all the Mission Partners who have supported our New Mission Starts and our Mission Developers. Thank you for Your Generosity. Let us continue working In Mission Together +

2018 Synod Assembly Communications Report Mr. Jason O'Neill, Communications Manager



Website and Database

The Synod Council approved a major website update to include a database to begin working like another employee. This has eliminated duplicate efforts by synod staff to maintain required records for our leaders and worshipping communities. The site is also now accessible across all devices via responsive design and offers many user-friendly options (i.e., exporting events from our online calendar to your own calendar, viewable resources prior to downloading, the ability to search for resources in a number of ways, etc.). We will continue to make improvements and upgrades throughout this year.

Guidebook / Book of Reports

With the relaunch of our website and a database to support it, we opted out of using Guidebook for this year's Assembly and posted the Book of Reports and all other relevant Assembly data online, which is fully accessible on all devices.

Forms / Reporting Ease

Our website now allows us to create custom and simple reporting and registration forms. We will continue to assess what information is vital in order to keep updating our forms to their simplest formats.

Zoom (Video Conferencing)

After research, we have partnered with Briarwood for a Zoom account, which has already paid for itself in savings from meeting costs for our Synod Council. We also use it for PLMA students to have access to classes here at Briarwood, and Briarwood uses it for board meetings. We look forward to how this might improve access to offerings by both the synod and our ministries here.

Regular Communication

We produce a weekly newsletter (usually released at 9am on Mondays) available to anyone (sign up on any page on our website: ntnl.org). We produce a monthly newsletter (usually released at 9am on the first Wednesday) targeted to our leaders across the synod.

Newsletter Stats (March 1, 2017 – March 14, 2018)

Increased subscribers from 1,869 to 1,890. Added 175 new subscribers. Removed 154 unsubscribes and bounces. Net 1% increase.

Average open rate of our messages is 26% (non-profit average is 25%; church average is 22%).

Average click-through rate is down from 16% to 15% (non-profit average is 3%).

Social Media Stats (March 1, 2017 – March 14, 2018)

[Facebook](#) account likes from 775 to 835, with 805 followers. Growth of 60 likes (8% increase) and 96% follow rate.

[Twitter](#) account followers from 1,410 to 1,044. (We added 1,059 followers. Twitter removed hundreds of thousands of bot accounts.)

[Instagram](#) account followers from 337 to 448. Growth of 111 followers (33% increase).

SYNOD MINISTRY TEAM REPORTS



NT-NL Congregational Vitality Team **Pastor Jeff Borgwardt, Team Leader**

During 2017 the New/Renewing ministry team has had a name transition to be consistent with the terminology used by the Domestic Mission Unit of the ELCA. We are now known as the Congregational Vitality Team. Although a name change sometimes seems like simply rearranging chairs, in this case, our team believes it is a significant change.

The focus of congregational vitality is on assisting congregations to be effective in their ministries in the lives of individuals, in the congregations, and in mission in the surrounding community. This is an ongoing process for all congregations, always, which is why our team believes that this is a significant change for our team and the congregations we work with in the synod. This focus of the team helps us to live into our synodical vision of being “in mission together.”

We live into this vision as a team by working with the revitalization, renewal, or redevelopment of existing congregations, as well as working with opportunities for new mission starts across our synod. Our team continues to work with several congregations in various stages of these processes. Our team members welcome a conversation, formally or informally, about what vitality means for you in the congregation where you are a member or where you serve as a leader.

As we have shifted to this focus on vitality, it also became clear that we needed to make a change in our team structure. We have divided our team into two groups of individuals, one of which is focused on the vitality of existing congregations, the other on the vitality of new mission starts. We will continue to be one team, meeting together for mutual support, Bible study, and the sharing ideas. It is an exciting time to be a part of the Congregational Vitality Team!

In early 2018, several of our team members attended an ELCA training event in Houston for Mission Developers and Redevelopers, for the purpose of being better able to support leaders who are called to those ministries. Additionally, team members also attended a Synodical Coaching training event held at Briarwood, so that we are better equipped to use coaching in our work, as it continues to be an effective way of guiding individuals and congregations to a place of health and vitality.

Our current team members include, Pastors Jeff Bergeron, Jeff Borgwardt, Doris Dupree Harris, Ernie Hinojosa, Yvonne Kiebler, Alicia Thompson-Summers, Neal White. Our staff liaison is Pastor Irma Bañales, DEM. We bid farewell and thank you to Pastor Brad Carroll for his service to our team, as he accepted a call to serve a congregation outside of NT-NL.

If you have questions, please contact any member of the team. We look forward to hearing from you and working with you.

In Christ’s service,
Pastor Jeff Borgwardt
Congregational Vitality Team Chair
pastorjeff@firstlutheran.us



Giving Public Witness to Peace and Justice Team

Pastor Chuck Hubbard, Team Leader

The Public Witness Team meets on the second Saturday of each month at Shepherd of Life Lutheran Church, Arlington. We welcome those who would like to work with us as we live out a profound sense of call as people of Jesus committed to healing in the world.

We acknowledge that many of the churches throughout the synod are doing that in their own way, addressing social needs in their own communities. The Public Witness team can be a helpful resource to the church as it attempts to intelligently and faithfully confront the social realities that are often divisive within the church itself: racism, human caused environmental degradation, the just treatment of women, immigrant and refugee care, as well as charitable relief for the hungry and the homeless.

A few things for which we are thankful . . .

. . . for the immigration attorneys and staff at Schwamkrug, Freshwater and Lopez (Richardson, TX) who conducted “Know Your Rights” presentations in a number of contexts for the benefit of those at risk for deportation and for the people who love them;

. . . for Shepherd of Life Lutheran Church, Arlington, for its willingness to establish a relationship with a non-Lutheran faith community and have courageous conversations on the reality of racism in our society, and for hosting such important events as the hearings on the proposed ELCA social statement on justice and women;

. . . for Rejoice Lutheran Church, Frisco, and its efforts to build a coalition across religious lines, so that the prevailing social issues faced by the people of Frisco might better be addressed; and

. . . for the faithful people of St. John Lutheran Church, Dallas, who in so many diverse ways bring attention to racism in our culture, believing that if we are willing to face it, we can change things for the better!

We just had our first workshop on “The Church’s Role in Undoing Racism”. The presenters, Mrs. Joyce James and the Rev. Joseph Barndt, provided compelling and hearable presentations on the need to understand deep roots of racism in American culture and its pervasiveness in our institutions.

It is estimated that life expectancy for people of color in America, particularly blacks, is a few years less than that of whites due to race related stress. Racism has physical consequences. National Geographic is taking a hard look at the evidence for institutionalized racism within its own business culture. That is a courageous step; it needs to be done by other institutions, including the church. Good News: We can do something to promote healing – including racial healing – in the world.

Pastor Chuck Hubbard, chairperson
 NT-NL Public Witness Team
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