

NTNL Public Witness Team

2019 Report to the NTNL Synod Assembly

The NTNL Public Witness Team meets at Shepherd of Life Lutheran Church in Arlington on the second Saturday morning of each month. All who have an interest in the church's witness in the world on issues of social justice and peacemaking are welcome to attend.

Public Witness Team accomplishments – 2018

- Organized and presented “The Role of the Church in Undoing Racism,” March 9-10, focused on institutionalized racism and how the church must address it in faithfulness to God’s call. Presenters were Joyce James and the Rev. Joseph Barndt, and 33 pastors and lay people participated.
- Organized and hosted three hearings on the ELCA Draft Social Statement on Women and Justice.
- Hosted an “Undoing Racism” workshop presented by the Peoples’ Institute for Survival and Beyond, Aug. 28-30, co-sponsored by Child Protective Services (Texas Health and Human Services). Nineteen NT-NL pastors and lay people took part. This event resulted in a sketch for addressing racism in our territory. Some of the objectives of the workshop:
 - Develop a common definition of racism and understanding of its different forms;
 - Examine why people are poor and the role of institutional racism in fostering poverty;
 - Understand how all people in the USA are adversely impacted by racism;
 - Develop awareness of how to begin “undoing racism.”
- Developed Bridging the Gap: Better Conversations on Divisive Issues, a workshop piloted in late fall with more than 40 participants. Team members will make a presentation on this work to the pastors of the Heart of Texas Conference in early 2019.
- Conducted a book study on *Birth of a White Nation: The Invention of White People and Its Relevance Today*, by Jacqueline Battalora, Oct. 12.
- Co-sponsored Building an Inclusive Church training, Oct. 26-27 with St. Luke’s, Richardson. The seminar, conducted by Reconciling Works, examined how congregations can become more welcoming toward people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions.
- Promoted “Know Your Rights” presentations made by a team of immigration attorneys, and arranged for this presentation to be made to Dallas-area pastors (at the Schwamkrug, Freshwater and Lopez law firm in Richardson).
- Increased and broadened participation in Public Witness meetings by using digital technology (join us via Zoom).

- Created and printed a brochure to expand awareness of the work of the synod's Public Witness work and the church's call to be publicly engaged for the sake of peace and justice.
- Established a team assigned to generate funding for Public Witness Team projects.

In fulfillment of our mission the team has in recent years worked on issues related to middle east peace through the ELCA Peace not Walls initiative, concerns related to environmental issues and global warming, and led the "University of Samaria" at the synod assembly.

At a 2019 retreat we will discuss updating our charter. We plan to bring a proposed updated version to the Synod Council for consideration. We want to ensure that we are serving the needs of the synod and have appropriate endorsement of synodical leadership.

Background - The original charter for the Public Witness Team was adopted by the NT-NL Synod Council April 2007.

- Priority 1: Assist congregations in their efforts to be public church within their communities by developing networks that connect people of similar interests for peace and justice.
- Priority 2: Engage 100 percent of congregations in an earnest annual response to the World Hunger appeal by the end of 2008.
- Priority 3: Focus annually on a selected social issue for our synod's study and action beginning in 2008.

Possible future charter planks to be discussed at the retreat:

- To help the synod fulfill its commitment to promote courageous conversations on racism (New Business # 1, adopted 2016); specifically, working with "conference deans and the NT-NL Bishop's staff to provide resources, for every congregation that do one or more of the following:
 - Heightens awareness among our members of personal, implicit racial/ethnic bias;
 - Increases awareness of and equips members to address institutionalized racism;
 - Identify congregations that are interested in engaging in Courageous Conversations on Racism; and
 - Urges the Mission Area to provide anti-racism training annually."
- To help congregations in our synod explore the most pressing social justice issues of our time.
- To advocate for Texas Impact and to recommend to the bishop persons who would represent the synod by serving on the Texas Impact board.
- To forge working relations within the synod as well as ecumenically and among inter-faith groups beyond our own church body for the sake of promoting informative dialog and advocating for constructive social practices and policies.