

## Report of the Vice President, NT-NL Synod

As vice president my work has been to lead the work of the Synod Council and the Executive Committee of the Synod Council. With the bishop, I have prepared the agendas for the meetings, and then chaired the meetings to allow us to have full discussions and to complete the business before us in a timely manner. But what does the Council do?

The role of Synod Council is to carry out the business of this synod, this gathering of ELCA congregations between synod assemblies when the voting members of each congregation gather to review and conduct business. Serving as a member of Synod Council involves participating in three business/visioning/learning meeting a year. They handle reports and synod business meeting in the whole. Additionally, they serve in one of three sub-committees. First, Finance (which includes Audit), where they work with the Synod Treasurer, Mark Bradley, and Synod Administrator for Finance, Jeanne Heggen. The Legal and Constitution Review Committee works with the Council Secretary, Todd Weiss and Bishop Associate, Pastor Kris Totzke to help congregations and the synod have constitutions up-to-date. With a model constitution template available from ELCA churchwide it is easier than ever but ever more critical. Finally, the third committee is the Nominating Committee which works with the Deans and Conferences and the NT-NL office to identify persons to provide leadership through the Synod Council and Committees and to be sure the nomination process is in place for nominations to be received from the floor of the Assembly.

The second leg of Synod Council members responsibilities is to serve as contact persons between congregations, Conferences and NT-NL Synod. They are about communication and fostering relationships! It is more nebulous a role, but critically important. Especially considering the distances over which we are spread and the differences in the contexts – ranch lands, small town and cities, suburbs, and urban areas both fading and growing ones.

You are great folks! It has been my honor and privilege to serve with more than 50 folks over my eleven years as NT-NL Vice President. My thanks to each of you.

Gracias!      Asante!      Kiitos!      Tenke!      Thank You!

The second aspect of the role of the Synod Vice President is to work with the Bishop of Synod and the staff of the Bishop's Office. I have been blessed to work with Bishop Erik Gronberg and Bishop Kevin Kanouse plus Bishop Associate Pastor Kris Totzke, Bishop Assistants Pastors Jane Mar, Stan Meyer, Nancy Amburn Fisher, and Directors of Evangelical Mission Pastors Steve Kanouse and Irma Banales. All are people who care deeply about you and the Church. In addition, I've been blessed to work alongside Tyna Oslie, Jeanne Heggen, Jason O'Neill, and Judy Rommel.

Gracias!      Asante!      Kiitos!      Tenke!      Thank You!

I ask your indulgence now as I share some personal reflections with you. Change (I know, it can seem like a four- letter word) is all around us. As I reflect on my eleven years as NT-NL Vice President people have come and gone; some congregations have been started and some have closed; friends and family members have died and new babies have been born and been baptized. The words of the writer of

Ecclesiastes tell us that there is a time to be born and a time to die; a time to raise up and a time to tear down. There is a time for every purpose under heaven. I have experienced major changes in my life and know that they are not easy. With change we may experience loss, sadness, fear and uncertainty. But we can also experience hope, new life, new relationships, new energy, new challenges, and renewed trust in God.

My point is to remind us of two things as our congregations and our society change:

- 1) The power of relationships. We were created to be in relationship with God and with one another. We were created to relate, share, care, and love. We receive God's strength and love through others, especially our brothers and sisters-in-Christ. We, as individuals and as congregations have the mission to share the love of God with those around us and around the world. Keep talking together; keep collaborating with one another as you are open to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us.
- 2) God is faithful. We are not alone. God loves us. God loves all people and God's whole creation. God is faithful. We are not alone. God is with us comforting us and challenging us. God cares for us and directs us to share God's love, mercy, and justice with others. You and I are individual people, but we are joined together by God. In this geographical region 103 Lutheran congregations come together to form the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod. We unite with the other 64 synods to be the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are not perfect; we do not think alike. But Christ is our Lord, our Savior and our model of the godly life.

I close with thanksgiving for all the people it has been my honor to work with for eleven years – congregations, conferences, Synod Council members, bishops and synod staff members, Briarwood staff, and friends from around NT-NL and the ELCA. Most of all I offer my thanks to God for this opportunity to serve you.

Gracias, Asante, Kiitos, Tenke, Thank You.

Stephanie Varnum, Deacon