

Report of the Bishop, Assembly 2019, Calvary Lutheran Church, Richland Hills, Texas.

Partners in Mission Together,

When elected in 2016 I outlined five key points of focus for our work together. As we moved through 2017 and 2018 I reported to you how those areas were blending together into new areas of challenge and opportunity. In my 2018 report I lifted up three areas of emphases. Much work has been done on these goals in 2018-2019 and is reflected in this report below. Ultimately I think the most critical aspect of our life as synod is that we grasp the vision that we are #InMissionTogether We continue to be called to work together to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, serve in Christ's name, raise up leaders, and work for justice for our neighbors.

In 2018 we as synod, the staff of NT-NL and Briarwood, and I as your bishop focused on three major key areas...

1) Engaging youth and young adults.

This work is primarily done on the congregational level and I am privileged to witness it in my travels. It is the role then of the synod and Briarwood to support and supplement this work. In 2018 we did so by...

- A) An ELCA first! The 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering Bishop's group of 32 youth from 11 congregations participated along with over 350 NT-NL. An increase from 2015. Thank you to the congregations and the support I received from our synod gathering coordinator Janelle Miller (Calvary, Richland Hills)
- B) Engaging NT-NL youth leaders. Pastor Totzke and Briarwood program coordinators meet regularly with these leaders. We also hosted the Executive Directors of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) at Briarwood for their annual retreat. www.ntnl.org/young-adults-and-lutheran-outdoor-ministries/
- C) Our first ever NT-NL ConFEST (Confirmation Festival) was held at Christ, Dallas under the leadership of interim Pastor Lanny Westphal. This first event was met by overwhelming response. Over 130 youth and 50 adult sponsors gathered for an afternoon of learning and worship.
- D) The recent addition of Avery Hawley (member of Trinity, Fort Worth) to the staff at Briarwood as the Community Engagement Manager specifically outlines engaging NT-NL congregations more intentionally as a job goal.
- E) In 2018 I took a more focused role with our staff and leaders at Briarwood and with the hiring of Dr. Robert Smith and NT-NL now is partnering even more fully in the vision of the Briarwood Leadership Center. Briarwood is a critical component of our leadership development for all ages but particularly with our youth and young adults.
- F) ELCA Fund for Leaders: The offering of the 2018 assembly went towards this effort raising over \$25,000. This enables us to give NT-NL specific partial scholarships as well as Jonathan Lys (member of Shepherd of Life, Arlington) has received an ELCA full scholarship through the Fund for Leaders.

2) Education, Accountability, and Leadership for Lay and Ordained

Developing leaders for our congregational ministries both lay and rostered is critical. This is a role the synod can clearly play and have impact in. In 2018 we saw good progress in...

- A) Our greatest accomplishment in 2018 was the ordination of four pastors who had been raised up and developed by our congregations to serve contexts in our synod. www.ntnl.org/ordination-4-of-2018/ Pastor Leslie Dunlap (Grace, Abilene), Pastor Don Strickland (Grace, Fort Worth), Pastor Christopher Richmann (St. John, Coryell City), Pastor Miles Holder (New Hope, Keller). It is a momentous achievement for our congregations who lifted up these leaders and our candidacy committee (chaired by Pastor Cheryl Gorvie, Bethany, Dallas). This is something to celebrate and replicate.
- B) Parish Lay Ministry Academy (PLMA): Bringing registration inhouse by NT-NL staff has created clearer accounting processes and enrollment continues to rise in both English and Spanish tracks under the leadership of Dean Phil Heinze (Calvary, Richland Hills).
- C) Secondary School of Latinx Theological Education (SSLTE): Pastors Gus Vinejeras (Santa Maria in Exile, Irving) and Edy Santos (Adviento, Arlington) have partnered to develop this ministry being done in partnership with LSTC, Wartburg, and the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod. Pastora Bañales is staff lead. In 2018 we had our first pilot classes and were able to secure a grant from ELCA Churchwide to move forward.
- D) Coaching and leadership development for rostered and non-rostered leaders: Request a coach! www.ntnl.org/coaching Our 2018 NT-NL Leadership Convocation carried on these themes with General (ret.) Rick Lynch (member of Immanuel, Killeen) presenting on adaptive leadership. Additionally coaching opportunities were lifted up for leaders during this time.
- E) 2017 Assembly goals for reporting from leaders and congregations: Parochial Reports (90%), Mission Support (90%), and Rostered Leader Reporting (75%). This is where we have seen room for growth in 2019. Over 25 congregations who have not filed their parochial report. The goal of 90% giving some mission support is in reach but not achieved. Rostered Leader reporting took a step back so far in 2019. These reports help us connect and we value them. www.ntnl.org/annual-rostered-authorized-leader-report/

3) Recommitting to a healthy relationship with our ELCSL partners.

In October a group from NT-NL of myself, Pastor Kris Totzke, and Dr. Paul Bjerck (member of Gloria Dei, Lubbock and African History professor at Texas Tech) traveled to Sierra Leone for a celebration and recommitment of partnership. www.ntnl.org/accompaniment-trip-to-the-evangelical-lutheran-church-in-sierra-leone-part-1/. This was a positive trip as Bishop Momoh and I spent time together. We regret he continues to be denied visa's to enter the United States but we are putting together a plan for a young adult delegation from ELCSL to NT-NL in the summer of 2020. If you are interested in helping support this please contact my office. In 2018 in addition to that trip we were able to work with the ELCSL and ELCA Global Mission to...

- Help fund leadership training for women and lay leaders.
- Preaching workshops on Law and Gospel preaching.
- ConFest collected small catechisms at the request of Bishop Momoh.

As we move into 2019 a major goal will be continuing the important work we have been about in the synod developing leaders, supporting congregations, and building our capacity for youth and young adult ministries. I will be about three main things in 2019 that are central to our life...

- 1) **Continual Improvement in Communication and Connectivity:** Communication is a continual challenge in our age of overwhelming and constant messaging. NT-NL utilizes many methods of communication both directly to individuals and also through congregations through our weekly E-News and our monthly Leader News. Please sign up for both of those. Also, I pray you all are taking the time to read my blog www.ntnl.org/category/blog-of-the-bishop/ as well as those of our staff. These blogs are highlighted weekly in our E-News. As we moved forward with the position of the Director for the Briarwood leadership Center I have used my blog as an avenue to communicate directly with the entire synod and beyond the process were engaging in. In March I posted a FAQ about the position. www.ntnl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/02262019-FAQs-re-Briarwood.pdf. Additionally, my blog "What's in a name?" outlined the reasoning for utilizing the term synod for our life together and the name Briarwood Leadership Center. www.ntnl.org/whats-in-a-name/. Weekly congregational visitation by myself and staff continues to be a core of communication. Our doors are open. If you have questions I encourage you to speak to your conference Dean or email or call the synod office with questions or concerns.
- 2) **Continuing to Focus on Youth and Young Adults:** This is where the time I spend with our congregations, with our youth (I will be spending Saturday evening with the youth gathered here for assembly), and on the ministry of Briarwood is critical. In 2019 I will continue to look for ways to support our congregations and our young leaders.
- 3) **Stewardship Education and Development:** A wholistic understanding of stewardship as discipleship is critical for our communities to develop. I am grateful for our Stewardship Team leader Sandra Gass (member of Rejoice, Frisco) and my current stewardship coaching training cohort of Pastora Bañales, Pastora Violeta Siguenza (Walnut Hill, Farmers Branch, and SAWL Tom Scholwert (Joy, Rockwall). In 2019 we need to increase participation in stewardship training and coaching to grow our faithful response to God's abundance.

For the trust you place in me as your bishop, I am honored. It has been a busy 2018 and we look forward to a productive 2019. Know you are constantly in my prayers and I am grateful we are...

#InMissionTogether,



Bishop Erik K.J. Gronberg