

Bishop's Report to Synod Council / Assembly, April 2020

In 2016 I outlined five key points of focus that I, as your bishop, would attend to. The focus points were to be 1) present with our leaders and congregations, 2) encourage creative growth, 3) accountability with Latinx/ethnic specific ministries, 4) investment in Briarwood must pay dividends, and 5) name privilege and work for justice.

These have and continue to be foci for our work together and often are blending as we move into new areas of challenge and opportunity. Most critically we need to fully grasp the vision that we are #InMissionTogether to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, raise up leaders, work for justice, so that we may serve our neighbors boldly.

Last January we met and discussed a great many things related to stewardship, goals, and our work together. However, since that meeting we have been re-oriented by the COVID-19 crisis and the work we do together has changed dramatically.

It was on March 11th, 6 weeks ago, that I issued my first communication and guidance for congregations due to the growing threat of the COVID-19 novel Coronavirus. Since that time congregations and leaders have had to make difficult decisions about worship, the operation of church schools and ministries, and their own family's health and wellbeing. All of this done in an ever changing context in which advice and rulings from local, state, and national leaders is continually changing. Just this week we have released guidance on coming together again and how that might happen. This has been especially challenging for Briarwood. Coming off its best financial year in history in 2019, this shared ministry of ours has had to cancel retreats and as such has been without revenue since March 16th. The gala is going to be an online experience on May 16th and please consider a donation to support this ministry and its staff.

The closure of our church schools, the movement of worship gatherings to online experiences, and the radical changes in our pastor's duties and expectations has created a new and challenging leadership climate. This is adaptive leadership in crisis and I can say without hesitation that our NT-NL leaders have responded with grace, gratitude, and resilience. For that, as your bishop, your pastor, I am grateful.

The 2019 fiscal year for NT-NL featured several highlights that should be noted...

- We graduated 11 candidates from the Parish Lay Ministry Academy.
- Financial giving to NT-NL was up from 2018, however that included a decrease in undesignated mission support with more funds designated, a trend we have seen.
- Leadership formation continued, three candidates moving towards ordination in 2020.
- Briarwood had its strongest financial year in history and finished revenue positive.
- The Secondary School of Latinx Theological Education was begun and has become a model for leader training.
- Call processes and pastoral transitions continued to go well through the significant efforts of Rev. Kris Totzke.
- We had our first assembly in a congregation, fees have been significantly reduced, and positive financial results mean we have a surplus fund (which will prove useful).

Over the coming months I will be releasing a series of video presentations relating to various aspects of what would have been in my synod assembly report. These will feature (but not be limited to)...

- 50th Anniversary of the Ordination of pastors who are women.
- Stewardship highlights from 2019 including financial results, mission support comparisons and transparency, and resources for 2020.
- Leadership development programming and process.
- Partnership with the ELCSL
- Briarwood updates and future directions.
- Congregational life, biblical study, and worship resources

Resources for the Synod Council to be aware of (most from my blog)...

- “Coming together” guidelines and resources from TX/LA bishops:
<https://www.ntnl.org/covid-19-gathering-guidelines-and-worship-resources-ingles-y-espanol/>
- Stewardship Resources and opportunities to participate in the LEAD Journey:
<https://www.ntnl.org/stewardship-and-covid-19/>
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone support and needs:
<https://www.ntnl.org/accompaniment-our-partners-in-elcsl-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>
- CARES Act Provisions and Guidance: <https://www.ntnl.org/cares-act-provisions-guidance-for-congregations-and-schools/>
- Societal Chaplaincy (Leadership blog from Robert Smith):
<https://www.ntnl.org/societal-chaplaincy-preparing-for-the-storm-to-come/>

Takeaways to Share:

- Briarwood Gala Online Experience: May 16th, Vital to support Briarwood in this time. See <https://one.bidpal.net/briarwoodgala/welcome>
- May 5th: Grief Coaching Webinar from Briarwood and ELCA Coaching.
- MEF Emergency Fund Information: contact Linda Ness at MEF@ntnl.org
- LEAD Journey Opportunity: We currently have 2 congregations in the LEAD Journey. We are offering up to 4 more congregations the opportunity to participate in that three-year process free of charge. Please contact me at BpGronberg@ntnl.org. For more info about the LEAD Journey see www.waytolead.org
- NT-NL Stewardship Team: Generosity Now seminars can be done online for your congregation. For more information contact lma@ntnl.org
- NT-NL Young Adults: Online small groups are forming led by Avery Hawley (Briarwood) and Veronica Czutor (King of Glory, Dallas)
YoungAdultsNTNLSynod@gmail.com |
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2369699966655810>

Ministry continues and is expanding. New opportunities are being shared and we are learning how to adapt and grow. This is vitally important for us in this time. At the same time we must acknowledge the stresses, strains, and griefs we are all facing. Now is a good time to examine what we are doing and why. To remember we have a word to proclaim in the midst of challenge and hope to share. For your trust in me as bishop I am grateful and you are in my prayers