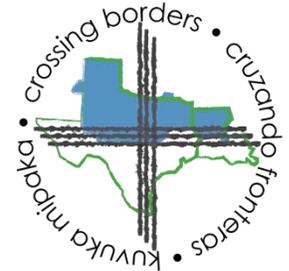


Report of the Bishop, NT-NL Synod Assembly and Council, April 23/24, 2021,

In early 2020 I communicated three areas that your synod staff focus on...

- 1) Continual Improvement in Communication and Connectivity.
- 2) Continuing to Focus on Youth and Young Adults
- 3) Stewardship Education and Development



These areas were discerned in a pre-pandemic world. As we have lived into the realities of Covid-19; reacting and adapting, learning, mourning, celebrating, these areas have remained focus points, just with different agendas than we might have initially thought.

In February for our synod council meeting, I highlight two main areas of work where we focused in 2020 and will continue to in 2021. With some additions those areas will remain guides for the work of your synod staff and leadership into 2021.

**Continually improving our communication and connectivity:** This has been a major focus as former ways of connecting and communicating had to be altered. To help our leaders with these adaptive challenges we have focused on...

- Improving ability to host online meetings including our first online synod assembly in Sept 2020, Leadership Convocation 2020, and Tri-Theo in January 2021 (attended by over 120).
- Sharing resources quickly relating to theology and praxis for online ministry.
- Weekly and monthly messages targeted to both lay and rostered leaders.
- Providing online content (sermons, bible studies, conference gatherings, prayer group) for leaders and communities to connect and learn.
- Recognizing reality of information overload and zoom fatigue.

One key thing to note in these above is that communications is a two-way endeavor and also needs your support in sharing what we offer and share. So please be an active participant in that work and support colleagues and communities.

**Stewardship Education and Development:** God has *Entrusted* us with the gospel and with abundance. A strong wholistic culture of stewardship continues to be an area of focus. In 2020 some highlights and opportunities are...

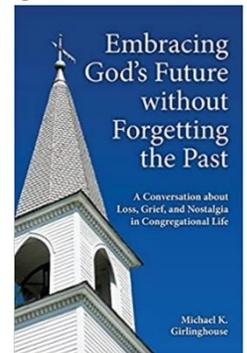
- NT-NL Stewardship Team opportunities [www.ntnl.org/stewardship-and-covid-19/](http://www.ntnl.org/stewardship-and-covid-19/)
- Leadership development IS stewardship. *In 2020 we ordained 7 leaders of Word and Sacrament to serve communities in NT-NL.* These ordinations are the culmination of years of work.
- Feb 2021 Webinar on Re-Imaging Church Space. Recording available on our YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtXYUwIwGC5VfWUzvKLBByhw>
- Eight congregations are doing intentional leadership development through LEAD or the Leadership for Faithful Innovation (LFI) cohort through Luther Seminary. These opportunities are made possible by our synod DiscipleLife Alive endowment. Pastor Kris Totzke is available to congregations and conferences to walk them through the LFI process (see her report for more information).

Stewardship also includes our work in evangelism and our financial lives. At our 2020 assembly I spoke the truth that for almost two decades now NT-NL and the ELCA have been in decline. This includes membership as well as mission support giving. In 2020 undesignated mission support income for 2020 was down 10% vs. 2019.

Covid-19 was clearly responsible for some of this decline. It has dramatically impacted our economic lives and as such that of giving to local congregations. However we also again witnessed the importance of stewardship education and intentional efforts of leaders to connect with their community and in a year of pandemic recognize also how interconnected we are. Despite the challenges of Covid-19, 34 congregations increased undesignated mission support in 2020 vs. 2019. (see Assembly materials for full mission support summary by congregation).

In 2021 your synod leadership and staff will continue to encourage and provide opportunities...

- Focused conversations with synod council and conference deans around identifying congregations and leaders who would benefit from...
  - Cohort conversations led by coaches and other leaders.
  - Stewardship consultations and trainings.
  - Engaging innovation through the Leadership for Faithful Innovation process.
- Continued transparency in reporting undesignated mission support giving and looking to learn from congregations that are growing in their generosity.
  - Surveying congregations that increased in 2019 to learn better practices.
  - Ensuring our first call and leaders new to synod are aware of resources.
- Synod Assembly emphasis and theme Entrusted with a special emphasis on recognizing the grief and loss of change but also looking towards God's Future with hope led by Bishop Mike Girlinghouse.
- Partnership Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest about legacy giving.  
Webinars April 11, 13,15, and 18<sup>th</sup> <https://www.ntnl.org/event/the-way-forward-to-legacy-generosity/2021-04-11/>



2020 has changed you, your context, and the mission field. Your methods have adapted but the proclamation of Jesus Christ, remains the same. You have been *Entrusted* with God's abundance and with the story of God's love poured out for you and all people. This gospel, into which you have been baptized, then sends you forth into lives of evangelism, stewardship, and justice.

I would be remiss not to extend gratitude to your NT-NL Synod staff that continue to serve our congregations well, facilitate leader transitions, and go about the many tasks that are required to operate our synodical structure. They, as have you, have pivoted and adapted and have done so with good spirits and openness to learning and change. For *Entrusting* me with this role as your bishop, I am honored. Know you are constantly in my prayers and I am grateful we are...

#InMissionTogether,

Bishop Erik K.J. Gronberg