

NT-NL Vice President Report
NT-NL Assembly
April 29 – 30, 2022

In Mission Together – In Person

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone at the upcoming synod assembly for the first time in my term as the vice president of the synod council. It's hard to believe that I'm coming up to the last year of my term as vice president and this will be my first assembly where we are able to safely gather in person. Like most of you the synod office had to make adjustments in order to meet and gather together both to worship and to conduct the business of the church these past couple of years. While things may not have been the way they used to be, we were able to get things done, assist congregations in need, conduct training events, conduct meetings and assemblies, and elect folks to leadership positions within the synod.

Over the past summer, we provided financial support in conjunction with LuMin Austin to gather names of incoming freshmen and send them to the supporting campus ministries at those colleges and universities. This project connected campus ministries with 276 ELCA Congregations in Texas, and the response from those congregations was more than double they had received in previous years. As a result, these ELCA high school seniors now have connections with the synods of their respective universities throughout and even outside of Texas, allowing relationships to be established in campus ministry before they even set foot on their campus.

This past fall the Briarwood Leadership Center, in conjunction with the synod office, offered a number of lay leadership conversations and trainings designed to cultivate leadership skills for current and future members of ELCA congregational councils. We discussed why people should or should not serve on councils, the roles of the council, constitutions, budgets, and how lay members can lead their church into the future. We had around 40 people attend, and based on the feedback that was received folks found the conversations informative and well received.

In addition to the activities highlighted, the synod council conducted our normal meetings throughout the year. We received reports and updates from the synod staff, reviewed the financial status of the synod, and acted on actions and recommendations. After our September 11th council meeting at Briarwood, there was a nice NTNL social gathering where we took the opportunity to remember the 20th anniversary of the attacks on September 11th and celebrate our first NTNL in person gathering in over 18 months. We were privileged to have Rev. Christopher Otten, the ELCA Director for Federal Chaplaincies, preach during the service portions of the gathering. It was a well-attended gathering and nice to see so many familiar faces in attendance. In contrast, our February council meeting ended up being a Zoom call due to an unexpected winter snowfall that made travel and facilities at Briarwood less desirable than usual. But not to worry, the council was able to meet online and again conduct the business required on behalf of the synod.

I want to thank the Synod council members for their time and leadership getting the council business done this past year. I would also like to thank Pastor Russell Vardell, Glenda Phillips, Doug Krug, Teresa Swecker, and Fritz Leifste for their input, dedication and leadership these past few years as their term on the Synod Council comes to an end. Also, a special thank you to our retiring Treasurer Mark Bradley. For the past eight years Mark has done a magnificent job overseeing our synod budget and providing updates throughout the year of our status comparing our revenue to our expenses. He has been a trusted and faithful servant of our synod and has offered to make himself available for the new Treasurer as the duties are transitioned from one to the other. We wish you all the best in your future endeavors Mark.

I would also like to thank Bishop Gronberg and the staff in the synod offices, BA Rev Kris Totzke, DEM Rev Irma Banales, Jeanne Heggen, and Jason O'Neill, for all of their hard work and dedication to keep the synod functioning. The amount of work this small staff gets accomplished and communicated to our vast synod is truly impressive and we are blessed to have them all.

Finally, I would like to thank all the congregations of the NTNL for your continued support of the synod and churchwide organizations. Your support has allowed synod staff to provide pastoral and congregational care for those in need, provide educational and learning opportunities, receive and coordinate disaster relief efforts as needed, and assist congregations in supplying interim and permanent pastoral positions during transitional periods. A portion of those contributions were also passed along to the ELCA Churchwide organization, which will help fund upcoming national events like the Churchwide Assembly later this summer and the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans in 2024.

In closing I hope everyone can be optimistic about the coming year. We have made it through some challenging times and have managed to stay In Mission Together. With the continued commitment of our synod members, we are poised to continue to make a positive impact in our communities. Please continue to stay safe and take the appropriate precautions when necessary. I look forward to the opportunities that the upcoming year presents.

Blessings,
Tom Blaney
NT-NL Vice President