



Northern Texas - Northern Louisiana Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

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Report of the Bishop to the NT-NL Assembly
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Friends in Christ:

In the last year I have had a few conversations about the tagline I began using for us as synod back in 2016: *EnMisionJuntos/InMissionTogether*. These conversations centered on the Spanish version of the statement. Some of our Spanish speaking colleagues stated to me that it really didn't make sense to say we are in mission if we don't first say we are together. In considering that I realized the deep wisdom of that approach. How can we really be in mission if we are not together first. As such, our theme for this assembly is *JuntosEnMision/TogetherInMission*.

Currently our nation is being separated and divided by those seeking to control. Our political system is such that a small and committed group can effectively control major political parties. With only two options we are left to the assumption that you are either for us or against us. And those who are not for us, are to be vilified. In our economic lives we are told that we need to ensure we "get ours" because if we don't someone, or even the government, will take it. Further increasing anxiety and fear, and once again separating us from one another.

The reality is that in our congregations and in our synod we have individuals across the political spectrum and whose economic situations are varied. We have deep disagreements about how our civic life should function and different levels of agency within our systems. We also have an inequity in the real consequences of these realities for our siblings in our synod, particularly those historically marginalized based on gender, race, sexuality, etc...

So how can we be *JuntosEnMision/TogetherInMission* in such a climate? When our realities are so different across our contexts? When our economic and political lives tell us that the individuals sitting next to us in this very assembly may be our enemies?

If we allow our economic and political lives to be our predominant identity then in fact we cannot be *JuntosEnMision/TogetherInMission*. However, if our baptism is our primary identity, that we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection in those waters, then we have a chance at being *JuntosEnMision/TogetherInMission*.

To do that however is going to be exceptionally difficult for us all. It is going to require risk, uncomfortable conversations, and patience. A willingness to listen to our siblings in Christ, to value their experience, and to not choose to only speak and commune with those who agree with our political and economic values. To, as I referenced in my sermon, maybe stay in the cell and speak with the jailer about the freedom he could have in Christ. (Acts 16).

Northern Texas – Northern Louisiana Synod – Juntos en Mision/Together In Mission!

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This is risky behavior and I am not advocating putting oneself in physical danger. Martyrdom is not something to seek. And both the world and this church have done injury to individuals particularly those historically marginalized. However, as we are able, particularly those of us who have been historically lifted up by society and the church, we must be willing to listen, learn from, and sit with those the world would tell us are our enemies. Jesus commanded it (Matt. 5) and if we don't live it out, this separation and violence in our world will no doubt continue.

So how do we do that? We must put our baptismal identity first before our political and economic identities. Recognizing this identity, and the people it will put us into contact with, may cost us socially and economically. But that is our call and is essential if we are to be JuntosEnMision/TogetherInMission. Our witness to the world will not resonate if we are proclaiming a gospel that is only for some on a political spectrum of left or right righteousness. If our gospel gets confused with our pride in our nation and somehow gets contorted to believe that our nation is somehow chosen by God above others. Human empire claiming God's ordination comes and goes, the baptized community remains: JuntosEnMision/TogetherInMission.

In the midst of this existential reality we have had a great many good things happen in our synod in the last year.

- Our move to Good Shepherd has gone well. We have learned to appreciate one another, making plans for some improvements to the facility for accessibility, and the synod budget is improved due to the lack of debt on the leadership center.
- We ordained 6 candidates to Word and Sacrament. Four serving NT-NL congregations, 2 serving the wider church.
- The parish lay ministry academy graduated 7 candidates. Enrollment remains strong. We give thanks for the work of Madeline Richard as Dean. Beginning in 2024 Ms. Jeanne Heggen will be serving as Dean of the PLM.
- We supported the ELCSL in becoming more self sustaining as well as finish out a part of the Jubilee Center which will enable them to lease their Aberdeen property.
- The Briarwood Legacy Endowment distributed \$150,000 directly to congregations for youth activities in summer 2024. For the ELCA Youth gathering 16 congregations: 166 youth, 50 adults, 8 young adults. For Camp Scholarships: 7 congregations: 91 youth
- We also called the Rev. Nathan Swenson-Reinhold as NT-NL Coaching Coordinator and the Rev. Adam Stockton as Youth/Young Adult connector.

It has been a busy year. For your support as your bishop I give you thanks. We are truly living into what it means to be JuntosEnMision/TogetherInMission.

Bishop Gronberg