



# 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 Synod Assembly April 24, 2026

### Summary Report:

- 2025 was a strong year for NT-NL overall. We had ordinations of four candidates to serve our congregations. This continues a pattern in NT-NL of raising up leaders. We also welcomed several new pastors to our synod. Financially congregations were generous with synod benevolence. While we are still in a state of gradual decline 2025 giving showed congregations are resilient.
- 2026 is off to a strong start. Congregations are reporting good energy. Our Parish Lay Ministry Academy has enrolled over 20 students including several from other synods. Synodical unrestricted financial mission support for 2026 has come in strong and close to budget. Thank you for your congregation's generosity.
- The 2025 assembly resolution to bring a plan about new mission starts is pushing us and we continue to work on it. The synod council has engaged with this work as well as other groups throughout the synod and learning from others. A report on this work is included in the materials and we will take time to discuss it during assembly.

### Synod Activities:

As synod our first priority is to do this work in mission together. Our first rostered/authorized leader gathering in several years was held in October 2025. It was a well attended event in which leaders gathered for worship, retreat, and time together. I give thanks to our Bishop's Associate the Rev. Kelsey Fitting-Snyder for her work on coordinating this event which in part was funded by the Briarwood Legacy Endowment and the DiscipleLife Alive Endowment.

Raising up leaders is essential for us in NT-NL. As mentioned above we had four ordinations in 2025 of candidates raised up by NT-NL congregations for NT-NL congregations. Already in 2026 we have another approved candidate who likely will be ordained to serve an NT-NL congregation very soon. We also are a net producer of candidates for the ELCA. Another NT-NL candidate is interviewing in another synod. Our Parish Lay Ministry Academy, lead by Deans Jeanne Heggen and Rev. Jesus Escamilla is robust. NT-NL supplies leaders for the church.

In 2025 we were given a mandate by the assembly to explore how to start four new missions in the coming years. We will discuss this in detail at Fridays assembly time and a report on this is included in the assembly materials. This work is important. It is also important that we recognize we currently have three new missions currently under development. One of these is a unique mission specifically to young adults in our Hispanic community. PODER is an intentional community that I believe has great opportunity for being a model of "new church." Church that is not physically centered in a specific place but truly focused on the people of God gathering.

NT-NL is leading in technology and change by continuing our partnership with the ELCA

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Innovation Lab in learning about the Metaverse and how AI can be used in church life. In early 2025 the synod council spent time learning from Scott Lyon of Solace VR about the AI Assistant. Currently 15 NT-NL congregations are utilizing the AI Bot on their websites. In the last 6 months the bot on the NT-NL website has fielded over 4,500 queries. You can utilize it at <https://www.ntnl.org/lutherbot/> Scott will be presenting at this assembly.

Our relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sierra Leone is a vital part of our work together. Bishop Momoh's Easter greeting is included in the reference materials. In this time of global instability those on the margins experience the pain most critically. We continue to support and encourage the work of the ELCSL and support it with our prayers and finances. If you are interested in learning more about the ELCSL we would welcome that.

The reality we face is that mission support is steady but also steady in decline. As such we continue to look for ways to support mission financially through alternative means. Through gifts from closing congregations, mineral rights, and the Lutheran Foundation of the Southwest we now receive approximately 5% of our annual operating income from non-congregational sources.

We are blessed to have endowments to support ministry. In 2025 The Mission Endowment Fund (MEF) gave over \$80,000 for grants to congregations. The Walnut Hill Endowment, focused on our Conferencia Latina congregations provided funds to support those congregations. And the DiscipleLife Alive endowment continues to fund leadership development. It is important that we understand those endowments do NOT support synod operational expenses.

In February 2025 our synod council approved changes to our staff handbook. One of those changes set parental leave at 12 weeks paid leave. We felt this was a good example for our congregations and institutions. We will live into that leave policy here in 2026. Anna Thompson, our synod admin, and her spouse Greg are expecting a child in late May. As such we will be without her presence in the office for much of the summer. This will provide an opportunity for us to model this for congregations as well as better understand her role. Provision for communications and other duties is in process, we will appreciate your patience.

### **Briarwood Legacy Endowment:**

The ongoing work of Briarwood continued robustly in 2025 with well over \$130,000 shared with congregations and ministries. The endowment contributed \$90,000 direct to congregations for camp (\$45K), mission trips (\$25K), and local day camps (\$20K). In addition the endowment gave \$25,000 to congregations for clergy renewal and sabbaticals (these gifts were matched by the congregation). Another \$15,000 was shared for mission and ministry in renewing congregations and by special request. The request link is <https://www.ntnl.org/briarwood/briarwood-scholarship/>

In 2027 we will have an ELCA youth gathering in Minneapolis, MN. In 2024 the endowment provided \$125,000 to support 200 NT-NL youth attending the gathering in New Orleans. It is likely that level of support will be needed again and so plans are in place to provide equivalent funding for the Minneapolis gathering. As a result of the endowment in 2024 NT-NL had equivalent numbers of youth participating as in the pre-pandemic 2018 gathering. This was not the experience of most ELCA synods.

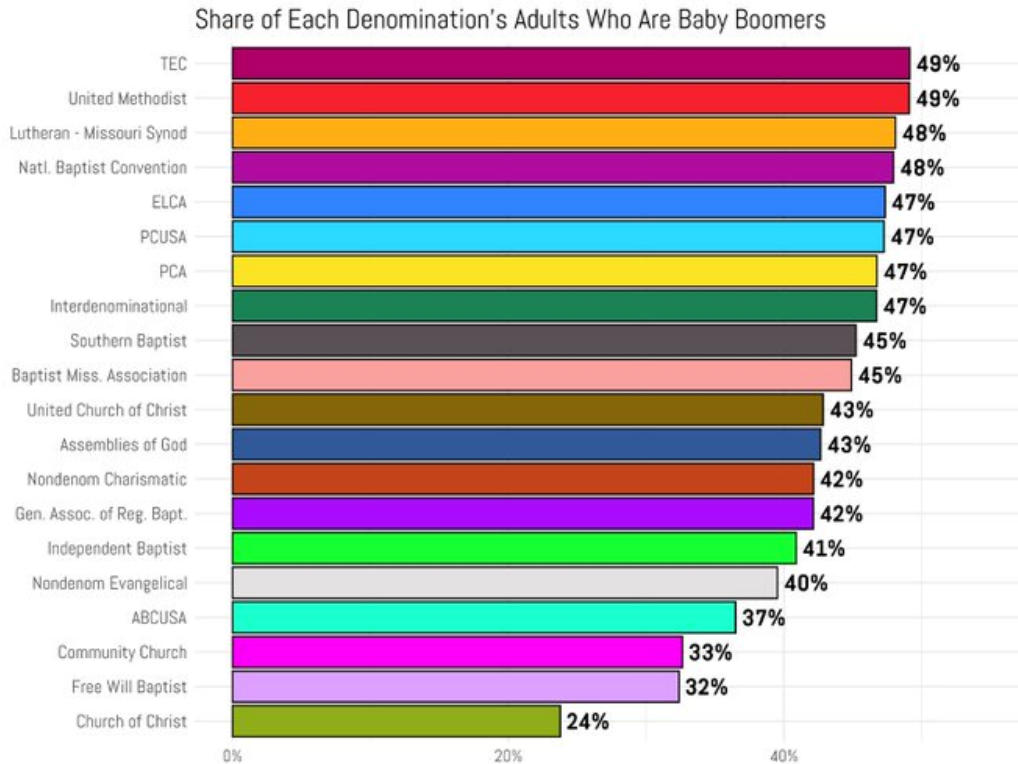
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## Closing Thoughts:

The need for us to consider new ministries is illustrated well by the graph below. 47% of our ELCA membership are baby boomers (born 1945-1964). Currently they make up 19-20% of the US population as a whole. This population imbalance means that our congregation populations are aging faster than our country. This will have significant ramifications for us. Not only in worship attendance but also in financial stewardship.



@ryanburge | Data: Cooperative Election Study, 2022-2024

God has and will continue to be faithful to us in our work together. The future is in God's hands. We trust the Easter promise while we acknowledge the reality that the tomb was empty because of Christ's suffering on the cross. We have abundant resources for ministry and mission. I encourage you all to look around your community. Who has the gifts to serve? Who haven't we invited to be part of our fellowship? What communities need to be served and hear the message of the gospel? And then Go, make Disciples.

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