



Dear Friends,

When the Wise Men saw the star, Matthew 2:10 tells us, “they were overwhelmed with joy.”

In this season, we rejoice and give thanks for the love of God found in Christ Jesus, the One who redeems the world.

We also rejoice and give thanks for you and for your support of the ministry of Briarwood. Briarwood is a collective ministry of the people and congregations of the Northern Texas–Northern Louisiana Synod (NT–NL). Briarwood’s mission of building congregational capacities to pass the faith from generation to generation and develop Christian leaders—particularly among youth and young adults—remains clear.

2018 has been a year of adaptive change at Briarwood. The Briarwood board has taken hard look at our ministry and analyzed how best we move forward. Tough decisions were made; staff and leadership have made tremendous sacrifices. The board, staff, and NT-NL leadership have focused on how to position Briarwood to continue its vital work developing leaders not only for the church, but also for God’s world.

One conclusion of this work was the need for greater intentional partnership between NT–NL and Briarwood to fully maximize the return on our investment in a leadership center at Briarwood. A new vision, building on and expanding Briarwood’s success, is being implemented.

We are pleased to announce that the Rev. Robert O. Smith, PhD, will be joining the Briarwood and NT–NL teams in early December as Director of the Briarwood Leadership Center. Pastor Smith brings a wealth of program knowledge and leadership to Briarwood as well as deep connections to the area; a Citizen of the Chickasaw Nation originally from Oklahoma, his first call was with St. John in Coryell City.



Prior to Briarwood, Pastor Smith served in the Global Mission Unit of the ELCA Churchwide Offices as Area Program Director for the Middle East and North Africa. For the past four years, he has lived in Jerusalem, serving as Director of the University of Notre Dame’s Jerusalem Global Gateway. He has held several volunteer positions in the global church, including in the World Council of Churches and as Special Adviser to the President of the Lutheran World Federation, Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan. Pastor Smith holds an MDiv and an MA in Islamic Studies from Luther Seminary (St. Paul) and his PhD in Religion, Politics & Society from Baylor University. He has published several books and articles on a variety of topics.

In addition to strong commitment to Briarwood's mission of leadership formation for youth and young adults, Pastor Smith will contribute to expanding Briarwood's capacity to engage networks for



leadership and theological education throughout northern Texas and the region. He is passionate about contextual education and thrilled to be returning to the dynamic environment of northern Texas. His unique set of gifts, passion for leadership formation, and pastoral care and concern for our youth and young adults make him a strong choice to lead us forward.

The goal of Briarwood is to provide leadership development for all ages. This happens in camping, developing our youth and young adults, as well as in

programming that spans generations. Briarwood will continue to offer energizing experiences and adventures for youth as well as thoughtful and affirming programming for those Young at Heart and educational fellowships for the leaders of the NT-NL, ELCA, ecumenical and interfaith partners and beyond.

The strength of Briarwood's ministry depends on you. As we grow and evolve to meet the changing needs of NT-NL congregations, our neighborhoods, and our broader communities, we rely on the contribution and partnership of individuals like you. Please consider making a gift to our shared work before December 31st, 2018.

Thank you for your support and consideration of a year-end gift. Your generosity will ensure the continued growth and effectiveness of Briarwood's ministry through 2019 and beyond.

In Advent hope,



Matt Baumhardt
Acting Director



Rev. Erik K.J. Gronberg, PhD
Bishop, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, ELCA