

# NORTHEASTERN OHIO SYNOD

November 12, 2015

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*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “**Do not be afraid**; for see—I am bringing good news of great joy to all people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.*

Luke 2:8-11

Dear people of God in the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

One of the recurring themes of all the Gospels is the insistence on overcoming fear. Countless numbers of times we read the phrase, “fear not,” “do not fear,” or “do not be afraid.” You can see it in the verses quoted above, the assigned reading for Christmas Eve from the Gospel according to Luke. It was important for the shepherds to hear these when they saw the angel of the Lord.

It was just as important for the disciples to hear a similar message as Jesus prepared them for what they would face when he sent them out into mission.

Fear is a natural human reaction. The challenge comes in learning how to deal with it. Author Jeff Wise wrote a book entitled, *Extreme Fear: the Science of Your Mind in Danger*. In an article for *Psychology Today* he states: “We spend most of our time trying to avoid fear, so we muddle along, rarely getting much better at the art of mastering it. That’s a shame because with a little effort we can find the courage to push beyond your comfort zone and tackle new worlds.”

In the same article he proposes nine techniques to train oneself to become more courageous. Space and copyright laws don’t allow me to reproduce the advice in this column, but the point is that fear is not insurmountable.

As I make my visits around the synod, I invariably encounter anxiety, if not outright fear. Paralyzed by declining attendance and shrinking budgets, congregational leaders wonder what will become of their congregations when the money runs out and the mission and ministry is no longer sustainable.

The message I share with them is: Do not be afraid. God has led you this far. God will not leave you or forsake you. The question that we must never stop asking as congregations is, “To what is God calling us at this time and in this place?”

It is never too early to begin that discernment process. Ignoring the challenge will not make it go away. It would be irresponsible to avoid wrestling with the question and its implications.

It may be that a congregation must close. As with everything and everyone else in creation, congregations also have a life span. Some ministries may have to come to an end. It would be foolish to deny that reality. Only the Kingdom of God is forever, not congregations. The courageous step for congregational leaders is to consider their options for the future – now!

We have several congregations that have begun to make decisions about their future. Some have entered into shared ministries, others have merged, and still others have taken steps to close. One important point to remember is that there is no need to feel guilty. It is not your fault. As the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us, “To everything there is a season.”

The leaders of those congregations that have already engaged in some form of transformation are willing and able to advise you as to how to proceed. We also have resources available at the synod office to help guide you through this time of discernment.

As we go forward in the reformulation of the Northeastern Ohio Synod, it is reassuring to know that God also goes forward with us. God has done wonderful things through our congregations. But, hear, in closing, the promises of God as written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

“Do not remember the former things,  
or consider the things of old.  
I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”  
[Isaiah 43:18-19]

May you be filled with God’s richest blessings this Advent and Christmas season!

In Christ,



+Bishop Abraham D. Allende



Staff congregation visits for the next weeks include:

Bishop Allende will be:

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| November 15 | St James, Tuscarawas<br>Hope, Cleveland Heights   |
| November 22 | Bethany, Ashtabula  |
| November 24 | Prince of Peace, Cortland, Community Service of Thanksgiving                            |
| November 29 | Bethel, Canton, Service of Holy Closure<br>St Stephen, Stow, Installation of John Corsi |
| December 6  | St Paul, Newcomerstown  |
| December 12 | La Trinidad, Canton, Our Lady of Guadalupe  |
| December 13 | Sagrado Corazon, Akron, Our Lady of Guadalupe   |
| December 20 | St Paul, Alliance   |
| December 24 | St John, Petersburg/Emmanuel, New Springfield Christmas Eve Service at St John          |
| December 27 | Zion, Winfield, Service of Holy Closure   |
| January 17  | Prince of Peace, Westlake, Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration                         |

Karl Biermann will be:

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| November 15 | First, Lorain   |
| November 22 | Grace, Cleveland Heights, Service of Holy Closure               |
| November 29 | St Stephen, Stow, Installation of John Corsi                    |
| December 6  | Grace, East Palestine   |
| December 13 | St James, Jewett  |
| January 10  | LYO Winter Gathering, Independence                              |
| January 17  | Prince of Peace, Westlake, Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration |

Terrance Jacob will be:

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| January 17 | Prince of Peace, Westlake, Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration |
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