

NORTHEASTERN OHIO SYNOD

June 9, 2016

We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 NRSV]

Dear people of God in the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

My second synod assembly as bishop is in the books and from all indications, it was a wonderful assembly. Let me first and foremost thank God for having led us through it all. I thank those of you who came and especially thank God for our presenters, those that led the workshops, our worship leaders, our invited guests, those who came as visitors, and those who were honored or recognized in one way or another.

It was far different than last year both in terms of the content and my sense of confidence in leading it. The workshops were well attended and all general comments we heard on the information received in the sessions were favorable, as also were the people's overall evaluation of the assembly itself. I regret that paper evaluation forms were not distributed at the assembly. I take responsibility for lack of oversight in that matter. But if any of you that attended wish to offer a general observation or two, please send a quick note or email to our office. We would love to hear from you. We have not yet set a date to meet with the planning committee to debrief and plan for next year's assembly but I hope to do that before month's end.

I continue to be concerned at the apparent lack of interest in people's willingness to serve in elected leadership positions. Again, this year, we had several of those positions that had either unopposed candidates or no candidate at all. It was not for lack of effort on the part of the nominating committee. The members of the committee and others begged, pleaded and cajoled people to offer their services and stand for election; but for the most part, those pleas fell on deaf ears.

I have often cautioned and will continue to do so: *Christ has entrusted his church to us. The responsibility for leadership has been given to us. Indifference, complacency and apathy puts the church at risk.* For that reason, if you are willing to serve or know of people willing to serve, please approach them and ask. Then contact the synod office and make their names known to us.

As was mentioned at the assembly and elsewhere, next year's assembly will be **June 9-10, 2017**. We are planning to have a youth gathering alongside our assembly with the idea of integrating parts of both events. I look forward to next year with great excitement.

I recently returned from a week in South Africa where I visited with Bishop SWS Sihlangu and the good people of our companion synod, the Northern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Africa. The companion Synods program was established by the ELCA in the 1990's to enable synods of the ELCA to partner with synods or churches outside the U.S., so that they may experience the gifts and witness of another church around the world. This type of relationship offers people the opportunity to participate with others through mutual prayer, study, communication, and exchange of personnel and resources.

We once had a committee that was very involved in global mission and a partnership with our companion synod. For a variety of reasons that committee has been inactive for several years. Some of its members have moved, some have died, some have gotten older while yet others have refocused their passion on to other interests. As I return I hope to communicate with some of those people in our synod to learn from them what fueled their passion initially for this ministry.

So the purpose of our visit was to reestablish that relationship, and to learn from the people of South Africa how, together, we can be more effective in doing the work of ministry. This reengagement is an opportunity for a fresh start.

I will be sharing more about those experiences on my blog, *Walking Together in Faith*, which is accessible through the Northeastern Ohio Synod website (www.neos-elca.org) or by going directly to the blog (www.pastorallende.com).

But to summarize my visit briefly, I came away from that experience overwhelmed with the depth of faith of the people I met there. Despite poverty, despite lack of those comforts that we enjoy – running water, electricity in some cases – the faith of these people was unwavering. I kept wishing we could somehow bottle their enthusiasm, their commitment, their love for God and God's word, and transfer it into the lives of people in this society.

We are called, through God's word, to be a people without boundaries. We are called to reject talk about building walls and work instead to build bridges. I ask that you keep our sisters and brothers in South Africa in your prayers as they will keep us in theirs.

Peace and blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abraham Allende', written in a cursive style.

Bishop Abraham Allende