

*For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. [Romans 3:28 NRSV]*

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ and people of God of the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

Have you read anything interesting lately?

Besides the *Bible*, most of my reading this year has centered on the Reformation and Martin Luther. This being the 500th Anniversary of the historic event that gave birth to our Lutheran tradition, I've been consumed by all things that have to do with the commemoration of this momentous chapter in the life of the church.

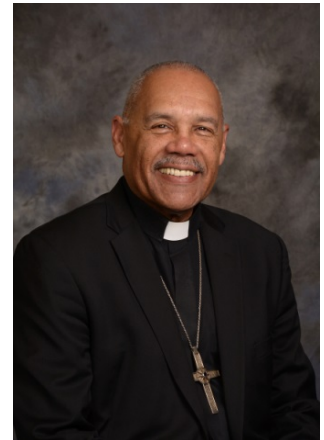
There is no shortage of information available, whether it be books, magazine articles, movies, videos, or audio recordings. There is so much material, in fact, that one can be swept away by the mere thought of determining where to begin.

Let me mention two specific titles; the first I've read, and the second I'm currently reading:

*Brand Luther*, by Andrew Pettegree, is a fascinating account of how Luther brilliantly used the printing press to spread the message of the Reformation beyond Wittenberg. Luther thus became the world's first master of mass communication. Coming from a communications background, I found this book tremendously appealing.

*Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet*, by Lyndal Roper, looks more deeply into Luther, the man, and his complex personality. It's about as honest a portrayal of Luther as I've ever read, revealing the good, bad, and ugly sides of his personality.

On my "to read" list is a six-volume series published by Fortress Press titled *The Annotated Luther*, that make available some of Luther's most important writings. This is



obviously a monumental challenge that will take up years of my time, but it seemed like a worthwhile investment that I can pass along to someone at an opportune time. Volume 1, *The Roots of Reform*, sits on my desk, beckoning me to open it when I finish what I'm currently reading.

Regardless of your level of interest, I would second the suggestion of our Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton, that we all read Luther's *Small Catechism*. It has become my constant companion. I carry a paperback study edition in my briefcase, as well as an electronic version that I can read at any time on my phone or tablet.

If we are honest with ourselves, the majority of us have not read much about our faith since we walked out of confirmation class. Even then, we read with the intent of completing an assignment and not to become better grounded in our beliefs. Therefore, we failed to retain much, if anything at all. We simply left it up to the paid professional – the pastor, deacon, or youth worker – to tell us what we needed to know at a particular time.

Those of us who benefited from a seminary education are also guilty at times, of becoming so involved in the day to day routine functions of our vocation that we are

susceptible to becoming complacent in replenishing that which informs our faith. There are reports to turn in, sermons to write, newsletters to finish, and meetings to attend. There doesn't seem to be enough time to get around to everything, so we put aside what we think we already know.

I realize this could apply to any aspect of our life. But when it comes to faith, God has blessed us with many wonderful gifts, in the words of the letter to the Ephesians, *"to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ"* [Eph. 4:12-13].

So, the 500th anniversary year seems as good a time as any to recommit to return to the basics. If we make a more determined effort to set aside time each day to devote to reading, we might be surprised at how much it would help to broaden our knowledge, strengthen our faith and develop our confidence in sharing the good news of the gospel.

I invite you to share with me what you're reading lately, and perhaps enter into conversation about how your reading has informed you.

Peace and blessings,



+Bishop Abraham Allende

