

"We know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law." [Galatians 2:16]

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ in the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

On September 5 I was blessed to witness the installation of the Most Reverend Nelson J. Pérez, as the 11th Bishop of the Cleveland Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. The Mass was held at St. John's Cathedral in Cleveland, which was filled to capacity with other diocesan bishops, priests, deacons, women religious, and representatives from ecumenical and interfaith communities. It was a glorious celebration.

As we draw closer to the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation, many congregations in Northeastern Ohio have or will commemorate the event in a variety of ways. I invite you to check our website and our weekly e-news where you will find opportunities to be a part of one of those commemorations.

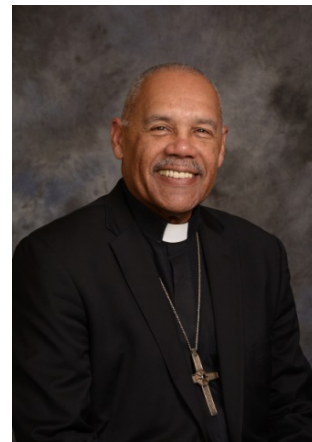
Throughout our synod, pastors have been offering Bible studies and celebrated worship services; many in union with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. The joint commemorations serve to remind our people that there is more that unites us than what separates us.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013), Pope Francis addressed the topic of unity among Christians with these words:

"If we concentrate on the convictions we share, and if we keep in mind the principle of the hierarchy of truths, we will be able to progress decidedly towards common expressions of proclamation, service and witness. The immense numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot leave us indifferent. Consequently, commitment to a unity which helps them to accept Jesus Christ can no longer be a matter of mere diplomacy or forced compliance, but rather an indispensable path to evangelization."

I find myself becoming more and more excited with each passing day. It's not so much a "little-kid-at-Christmas" type of excitement, but more of a hope-filled type of excitement; a hope that someday we will live into that unity that Jesus prayed for. It may not happen in our lifetime, but there's much evidence that we are well on the way.

Since 1517, the relationship between Lutherans and Roman Catholics has been marred by disunity, suspicion, and even hostility. That began to change in 1965,



when, shortly after the Second Vatican Council, Lutherans and Catholics entered into dialogue with the intention of moving from conflict to communion.

One of the fruits of those conversations was the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, which articulates a common understanding of our justification by God's grace through faith in Christ. It began our two church bodies on a path toward putting aside doctrinal condemnations that have divided the churches for 500 years.

Following that historic documents, the Northeastern Ohio Synod and the Dioceses of Cleveland and Youngstown, entered into covenant agreements in which we pledged to pray for each other, study together, and encourage communication at the parish level on matters of common concern. Over that time, we have participated in social action and advocacy on behalf of the poor and marginalized.

Framed copies of those covenants hang on the wall in the hallway facing my office. It is a daily reminder to me of the mutual witness to the faith that we share.

We make every effort to celebrate those covenants periodically. This October 29, the Sunday of the Reformation, we will gather at St. Columba Cathedral in Youngstown, for a service of Evening Prayer, and a commemoration of the Reformation. Bishop George V. Murry of the Diocese of Youngstown and I will preside at the liturgy.

I look forward to seeing you there, or at any one of the many events being held throughout out synod.

Peace and blessings,



The Rev. Abraham D. Allende,
Bishop