

*"Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."*

[Esther 4: 14b]

Dear Siblings in Christ of the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

Fourteen voting members from the Northeastern Ohio Synod travelled to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the first week in August to attend the ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

The Assembly is the highest legislative body of our church and meets every three years to worship, to discern what God is calling us to be as a church, and to be the body of Christ in word and witness.

It was a joy to be with our voting members, as we gathered along with nearly one-thousand others under the theme, "We Are Church."

A summary of the actions of the Churchwide Assembly is available in a separate document that is included with this mailing. Many of those were overshadowed by one, the adoption of a memorial that affirms the ELCA's long-standing commitment to migrants and refugees and declares the ELCA a sanctuary church body. Upon my return to Ohio, I composed a pastoral letter that hopefully gave a more thorough explanation of that decision. That letter is available on the Northeastern Ohio Synod website.

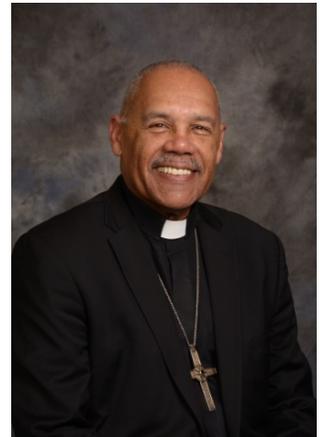
In this letter, I want to focus on what it is that makes us "Church." We are all children of God no matter the opinions we hold on any one topic. The good news of the Gospel is that Christ died for our sins and if we both can trust in that promise, then we can be church together despite our disagreements.

I stated in my pastoral letter that as Lutherans, we bring a unique voice to the public square. Diversity and different perspectives will always be part of the life and identity of this church. But unlike our political climate, our differences do not have to lead to divisiveness. Together, we can overcome our diverse viewpoints to implement a large-scale response to human need and suffering.

Through many and varied ministries, we are responding to social issues such as hunger, poverty and homelessness. We partner with our advocacy agencies to work for justice and peace. We are nurturing relationships with ecumenical and interfaith partners. And we are providing resources to equip members to worship, learn, serve and witness in their daily ministry. This is much of the same language that we hear in our baptismal promises.

Over the course of the next few weeks, we will share the written reflections of those from our synod who attended the assembly. I can say in general that it was an eye-opening experience for those who were there for the first time. I encouraged them to engage in conversation with you whenever the opportunity presents itself. And I would encourage you as congregational leaders to invite them to visit with you so all your people can hear their impressions firsthand.

I would like to share a portion of one of our voting member's reflections, Tim Wood, which made a tremendous impression on me, as well



as a bishop from the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Tim writes:

“Did I discover the reason for being called to this assembly? I can say that in no uncertain terms, I did. The Holy Spirit often moves us to action without preface. He prompted me to strike up conversations with strangers from the time I left the airport in Milwaukee. In the span of time of the conference I talked with many different people from all compass points in the US. Some were from families stretching generations into our history and some more recently immigrated from Nairobi and South Sudan to help define our country's future.

I opened some conversations to speak of faith only to learn that I was speaking with a pastor...Naturally reticent and quiet, the Spirit opened my mouth to entertain strangers. Did I unwittingly entertain an angel? Perhaps. Did I minister to some – or was I ministered to myself? Yes. So that was the real meaning I found. Yes, I can look back on the work done, the statements passed, resolutions accepted, and the elections to high offices as a kind of legacy – but it was the connections made with children of God that give me the most enduring memories.”

I would echo the words of Mordecai to Esther in the scripture verse at the beginning of this letter, perhaps God called Tim to the assembly for such a time as this.

You may not have realized this, but God is at work in our midst and through us, through our congregations and through the ELCA, to extend the invitation to abundant life and love offered

by God. God is using your lives and your words to be a sign of God's love to one another.

I would hope that when the opportunity for you to attend presents itself, you would consider standing for election as a voting member. Our next assembly will be close by, in Columbus, Ohio, in 2022. In the meantime, be the church!

In Christ,



+Bishop Abraham D. Allende