



# Northeastern Ohio Synod

## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

[Jesus said] *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

[Acts 1:8]



Welcome to the 2016 Northeastern Ohio Synod Assembly!

I find it hard to contain my enthusiasm as I write this report. The circumstances between last year and this one are decidedly different. The contrast, I would dare say, is positively overwhelming.

For starters, in late July of 2015, our Director for Evangelical Mission, Terrance Jacob, returned from medical leave. So for the first time since I began in this call, our ministerial team was intact. You can't imagine how much that contributed to our being able to focus on growing into the ministry together, and expanding and implementing our vision for the synod.

When asked to reflect on last year's assembly, I repeatedly replied that all I wanted to do was get through it without any major blunders. That meant taking a few risks as possible.

However, with a year of experience in leading the assembly under my belt, I felt compelled to offer many more learning opportunities during our time together this year in order to expand the horizons of our voting members and send them back to their respective congregations with a wealth of knowledge to share with the baptized of our synod.

So it is with joy that I invite you to take part in as many as possible of the six workshops that we are presenting throughout the day and a half. These conversations will cover a wide variety of topics:

- Worship
- Stewardship
- Racism
- Shared Ministries
- Lutheran Outdoor Ministries
- Hunger

Several of these workshops are being held in direct response to ten points of emphasis that I set last September at the beginning of my second year in office, when I, in collaboration with our synod ministry team, identified the areas on which we would place special priority. Some may consider ten to be too many, but with three people to divide the responsibility of oversight, we feel confident that we are capable of fulfilling the mission.

Without going into great detail in this report, let me highlight those areas of emphasis. They are (in no particular order):

- Relationship
- Worship
- Stewardship
- Mission
- Lay Education
- Youth
- Campus Ministry
- African Descent Ministry
- The Role of Synod Council
- Conferences and Deans

Other workshops are an outgrowth of initiatives that were brought to our attention by pastors and lay people in our synod. One that I wish to single out and encourage you to take part in is the **Shared Ministries** workshop, which will have special focus on rural and small town congregations, but which can be educational for larger congregations as well.

I mention this workshop in particular given the fact that our synod is smaller by six congregations since the last time we met. People become anxious when we experience so many closures in one calendar year, but closing may be the most faithful choice the people can make when attendance is dwindling and budgets are shrinking. Consider these closures as a way that God calls us to new ventures, the likes of which we cannot see the ending. Sharing ministries and resources may be one way to respond to that call.

In the book of the prophet Isaiah, the Word of God paints a fascinating image: “*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.*” (Isaiah 11:1). There is hope in this verse, as there is hope for the church. The image offered to us by the prophet is that although a tree stump may look dead, it is very hard to kill it off completely. And because the roots are embedded so deep that they are impossible to totally eliminate, a stump has shoots of fresh growth coming out of it from nearly everywhere. The stump of Jesse tells a story about the resilience of hope. Hope lives on no matter how bleak things may appear. New beginnings are possible even when we seem to be out of strength. New life can emerge even out of (what some perceive as) our failures.

Our theme for this year’s assembly is *We Are Church for the Sake of the World*. It is in keeping with one of Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton’s four points of emphasis for our national church body. You can read more about this emphasis in her written report.

In support of her remarks, I would add that locally we are faithful partners with our Churchwide expression. Together we respond to the needs of the world and witness to the Good News of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is that presence of God in our lives, working in, with, and through us, that sets us apart from social service organizations that address many of the same concerns.

I thank God daily for the work of our synod ministerial team: Pastors Karl Biermann and Terrance Jacob; Resource Center Director, Ms. Karen Kaufman; Candidacy coordinator, Pastor Laurie Miller; and Congregational Resource Team Coordinator, Associate in Ministry Mary Ann Schwabe. I am grateful for the support of Executive Assistant, Ms. Sony Gilroy, and our soon to be retiring receptionist, Ms. Kathy Lender.

I have become accustomed to using the term “team” rather than staff. Individually, we each bring different gifts to this ministry in order to collectively contribute to building up the body of Christ. As I grow into this office, I am also much more keenly aware that the work of the synod does not and cannot rely on one person alone, but in collaboration with you, the 61-thousand-plus baptized people of God who make up the 173 congregations in our 20 counties. You are the most valuable resource available to do the work of the Kingdom.

You may have noticed that we are holding this assembly on the weekend of Pentecost, when God sent the Holy Spirit into the world and the Christian church was born. Pentecost is a time when our churches often welcome new members or confirm existing members through Holy Baptism or Affirmation of Baptism. This is an ideal time for us to recall those vows that we made, or our patents made for us, at the waters of the font. I can think of no better occasion on which to affirm our commitment to continue in the covenant God made with us in Holy Baptism: to live among God’s faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord’s supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed; to serve all people, following the example of Jesus; and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth.

May we, by the grace of God, whose power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, resoundingly acclaim our response to God’s call: “*We do, and we ask God to help and guide us!*”

Peace and blessings,



+Bishop Abraham D. Allende