

# BISHOP'S NEWSLETTER

November 17, 2016

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*"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."* [Philippians 4:6]

Dear People of God in the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

The Rev. Margaret Marcuson has written a book for church leaders entitled *Leaders Who Last: Sustaining Yourself and Your Ministry*. I refer to it on occasion, mostly when I am facing an anxiety filled situation that requires me to manage my stress. I don't consider writing a newsletter article particularly stressful, but I checked back to the previous two years and it seemed quite uncanny that both November letters had to do with money.

At our October Synod Council meeting, we had a long and distressing discussion on the steadily decreasing trend in our congregations' giving to mission support. The council requested that I write a letter to our congregations, appealing to your generosity, especially as we enter the fourth quarter of our fiscal year. I will use this space to alert you that the letter is not quite in the mail, but it is coming.

In her book, however, Marcuson maintains that when a congregation says, "It's about the money," it's not really about the money. Rather, money becomes the focus for anxiety in a congregation. That anxiety stems from, among other things, a lack of clear vision of the future ministry of the congregation. In other words, we start saving, dare I say, hoarding for that rainy day that never comes. I would also add that it's not about the money, it's about our attitude towards the money and those around us.

The ELCA, in partnership with you, does a lot to support ministries worldwide and in our local communities. What you give is shared to expand your local ministry beyond your walls and do God's work in the world. There's a wonderfully informative video presentation on this topic, "Where Does Your Offering Go?," that is accessible through the ELCA website [or by clicking [HERE](#), if you're reading this electronically].

We continue to seek ways to educate our pastors and congregations on the idea of mission support. Our Director for Evangelical Mission, the Rev. Terrance Jacob, along with several others, has been working on these efforts for the past year. He shares his thoughts in the following paragraphs:

## **Exploring Mission Support and Stewardship for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

There are ongoing discussions in the church on how different generations approach giving (or mission support, as we call it in the ELCA) in each cultural or generational

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shift. In the mainline church, like the ELCA, our average member's age is 63. Therefore, some argue that the giving culture of the Baby Boomers (people aged 52 to 70 in 2016) should still be the order of the day. However, another interesting statistic is that sixty five percent of mainline church congregations are experiencing significant decline in membership. One contributing factor to this decline is the diminishing number of younger people in the church, that is, Generation Xs (aged 36-51) and Millennials (aged 19-35).

Is it this decline in younger membership that leaves us still committed to the Baby Boomer subculture – of giving, worship style, church government, language...? We wonder: have we decided that the Baby Boomer subculture is the way to go, since we want to fulfill the interests of our members? Then, we also wonder whether it is our Baby Boomer subculture that *keeps the younger people out*? These “wonderings” can lead us to analyze our church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century through various lenses, like: worship style, language, liturgy, race, age and gender. In the Northeastern Ohio Synod, one of our lenses, amongst others, is mission support (financial giving) and stewardship.

Our NEOS Stewardship Think Tank has been meeting for nearly a year. We have shared homegrown ideas that are working for our congregations. At our 2016 Synod Assembly, the Think Tank hosted two well-attended workshops on Stewardship. We are blessed to have a significant number of younger leaders in our synod, many of whom are first-call or second-call pastors. It is hoped that these younger pastors and leaders would attract younger members to our churches. However, the churches they serve are mostly older-member churches. Therefore, we need to provide learning opportunities on Mission Support and Stewardship that cover both the existing Baby Boomer subculture *and* the changing Gen X and Millennial subcultures.

Therefore, for at least a year, we will be convening a table for first and second-call pastors to engage in conversations on mission support and stewardship. We begin on February 1, 2017, with a 1-day seminar facilitated by a stewardship specialist from Pennsylvania, Rev. Katie Brantner, who is also a younger ELCA pastor. We anticipate that this table will not only be a training opportunity for younger pastors but a resource to the wider synod as we all consider what mission support and stewardship practice might look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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In closing, please bear in mind that we serve a God of abundance. As the apostle Paul reminded the church at Philippi, *“I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”* [Philippians 4:12-13]

Thanksgiving blessings,



+Bishop Abraham D. Allende