

*Hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

[Hebrews 10:23-25]

Dear people of God in the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

In a few short weeks, June 14-15, 2019, we will celebrate our annual Synod Assembly at the John S. Knight Center in downtown Akron. This is, for me, the highlight of our ministry year. You've probably heard me say or read a number of times how every year, the Assembly Planning Committee and I strive to make each assembly the best ever. Our goal is to make the assembly an event more than a business session.

This year's theme, *Who Is My Neighbor?*, will focus on social justice issues that we as a church are called to address, in response to the covenant we made in our baptism, which entrusted us "to care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace."

To that end we have invited the Rev. Amy Reumann, Director of Advocacy for the ELCA, who will bring us the message from the churchwide expression, as well as discuss her role in the Advocacy office in Washington, D.C.

We will also have the ELCA Glocal Musicians, who will bring us a variety of music from around the world, as well as educate us on how music helps bridge cultural divides.

Our youth will once again have their summer gathering alongside our assembly, and will

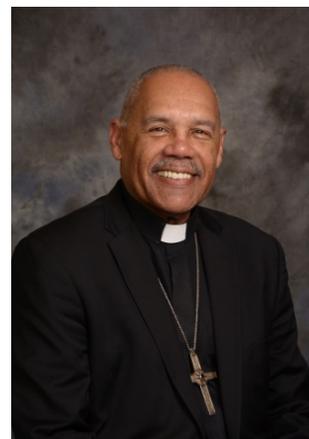
interact with the adults in an intergenerational service project.

For those who cannot attend the assembly, we will once again offer live streaming which enables you to see some of the highlights in the comfort of your home.

Yes, we still have to adopt a budget and other financial issues. We still have to elect people to various synodical positions. But when I was a parish pastor I looked forward to the assembly for the fellowship and the chance to see friends and colleagues that I hadn't seen for a year. There is something about being in a gathering of over 400 people that enlivens one's enthusiasm, and the joy of being among God's people made all those less than exciting parts of the assembly tolerable.

By far the most important experience that happens at our assembly is worship. It is from our gathering together to worship and praise God our Creator that all ministry flows. In our worship experience we are fed with the word and sacrament and are sent out into the world to make the name of Christ known to others by our words and by our deeds.

When God calls us, God calls us into community. The verses from the tenth chapter of Hebrews, at the top of this page, are one of many instances in scripture which emphasize the importance of gathering together.



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Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." [Matthew 18:20]

Even from the beginning, in the second chapter of Genesis God said, "'It is not good that the man should be alone.'" [Genesis 2:18]

In the Hebrews reading, the words, "*not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some,*" jumped out at me for obvious reasons.

There is an element of joy in corporate worship that is unequalled in any other setting. Worship can make us an incredible witness.

When we do not neglect to meet together to gladly hear and learn the Word of God, we are promised in Word and Sacrament the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We become bearers of the Word of God, free to do ministry in Jesus' name and to the Glory of God without seeking self-glorification. We have no idea how we might be making a difference in the lives of others.

As we prepare to celebrate Pentecost just before our assembly, let us remember on a collective level that we are not alone. Christ has given us three things with which to carry on until he comes again.

He has given us the Church, the body of his fellowship where we hear the word and receive the sacraments, signs of his gracious love, his means of grace, to be strengthened and encouraged.

He has given us the Holy Spirit, the present tense of God, through which God sustains us, enlightens us, and reminds us who God is.

And finally, Jesus has left us each other, imperfect as we are, to carry on his mission in the world and remind each other who we are and *whose* we are.

I look forward to seeing you June 14 and 15 at the assembly.

Peace,



+Bishop Abraham D. Allende