

*Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.*

[2 Corinthians 9:7-8]

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

If, after reading the scripture verses above, you anticipated this newsletter would be addressing mission support, you would be absolutely correct!

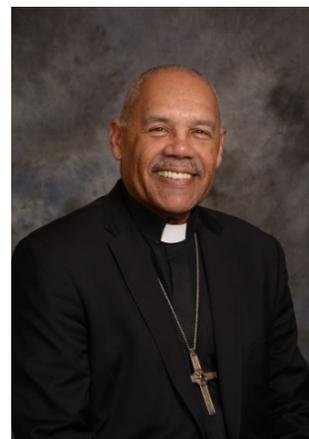
I normally find myself writing about mission and money much later in the year, but the summer months find us in the Northeastern Ohio Synod office wrestling with finances as we figure out how to reach those who are in need of the gospel as well as support our ministry partners in the months ahead.

From the time I first accepted the call to this office, our aim as your leadership team has been to provide for our congregations and the people we serve as best as humanly possible despite whatever economic challenges our synod may face. My worst moments in this office center around Finance and Budget Committee meetings.

And at our most recent Synod Council meeting, our treasurer, John Sleasman, normally a positive person, forecast a gloomy outlook that left me feeling somewhat distressed.

From reading Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians, you might be surprised to learn, as you consider his words, that money was also a struggle back in the apostle's time. To try to put

his words in modern language, he was saying to them that the call of the church is to be God's mission in the world, and that is something that cannot be done alone.



The growth of the early church would not have happened had they seen each of their ministries as separate. With Paul's encouragement, it appears that they challenged each other to see which one could outdo the other in generosity.

Unless you're reading one of my newsletters for the very first time, you've read my appeals for continued support to our ministry partners, our seminaries, agencies, and other organizations that do ministry on behalf of the saints of our synod and beyond.

I went back to previous letters or essays of encouragement that either I or others have written to congregations in order to find a more creative way to express my thoughts. However different the word order may have been, in the final analysis, the message was always the same.

As the Northeastern Ohio Synod of the ELCA we have been given many opportunities to be in mission for the sake of the gospel in many and various ways. But, it cannot happen without you and your congregation responding generously to God's mission in many places both near and far.

While more and more of our congregations are struggling themselves, we cannot and must not give up on the vision that each congregation

has a mission and a passion for communicating in its own community the good news of God's love for the world in Jesus; and has a passion to partner with others to proclaim God's love throughout the world.

Sadly, nearly two dozen of our synod congregations have shared nothing to support our common mission as a synod so far this year. If you are among those, consider how you could reverse that pattern and redirect your focus.

If history has taught us anything, it is that societies do not fall apart because evil people are doing evil deeds, but rather that societies rot away because good people are so focused on themselves and what they want that the good that needs to be done fails to get done. The same is true for congregations which concentrate solely on meeting their own needs. Eventually, their vitality begins to wane.

There are several others whose giving is lagging behind their previous year-to-date contributions. This may be a timing issue. If so, allow this letter to serve as a gentle reminder.

To those that have given generously, we thank you and thank God for you.

I take no pleasure in writing these kinds of messages. These admonitions don't necessarily contribute to building and developing strong relationships. But there are times when one needs to be forthright in calling attention to these issues.

Throughout these past several years, every effort has been made to provide learning opportunities to rostered ministers as well as congregations on the topic of generosity. We pray that in time those efforts will bear fruit.

We serve a God of abundance. I firmly believe that. But do we trust in God? Do we use our

wealth to serve God? Or do we serve our wealth?

Those are the questions I leave you with to ask yourself, to wrestle with, to contemplate.

I close with words of hope from the apostle Paul who continues his letter to the Christians at Corinth with the following:

*"You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. [2 Corinthians 9:11-12]*

May it be so.

Peace,



+Bishop Abraham D. Allende