

Choose this day whom you will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord
[Joshua 24:15]

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.
[John 15:9]

Dear people of God in the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

In Holy Scripture there are several well-known farewell speeches. I've cited from two of them above.

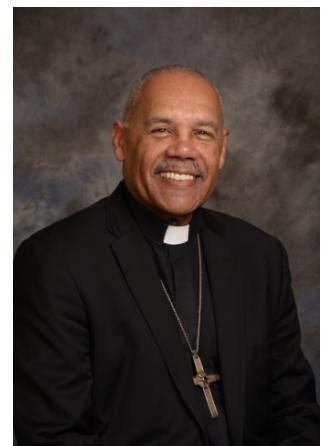
Farewell discourses in the Bible and Jewish literature follow a fairly consistent pattern. A spiritual leader gathers his followers around him one last time and utters words of instruction and encouragement. He recalls some of the highlights of his leadership and interprets their meaning for their future without him.

While the words that I write on this page are far from equal to those, I refer to them because I believe, at long last, that this will be the final time I communicate with you on this platform.

It's been more than a year since I announced my plans to retire. While some might think that was rather early, it was done to allow sufficient time for an orderly election process and a seamless transition to a new bishop.

Then, as we are all aware, something called the COVID-19 virus dawned upon us around March of this year and continues to disrupt life as we know it. Our assembly, originally scheduled for June, was postponed indefinitely, until finally, in September it was

held electronically, and a new bishop was elected. The Rev. Dr. Laura Barbins will begin serving as the Fifth Bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod on December 1.



Thus I have had more time than necessary to think about what I would say to you now that this moment has finally arrived.

And yet, I am a little hesitant to speak with finality.

Don't misunderstand, *I am retiring!* But in the back of my mind I am aware that God's Holy Spirit has surprised me at almost every point in both my personal and vocational life. Being elected bishop of the Northeastern Ohio Synod was not on my list of ministry goals. In fact, it was about the farthest thing from my mind. And certainly, extending my service beyond my term was a responsibility to which I committed with some trepidation, not knowing at the time how long that would last.

But as I have learned from experience, wrestling with those decisions is like Jacob wrestling with God. It's no contest. God wins every time. I'm not the one who is in charge of my life, where I will live, or what congregations or synods I will serve. It's God's call, not mine, not yours.

I remember writing somewhere at one time that throughout history God has made many

curious choices. Scripture is replete with plenty of those stories. And again, I wouldn't equate my choice as bishop with those whom God set apart to carry out God's plan of salvation for the world.

Serving God and serving you in this capacity has been purely grace.

And that grace has been most evident through you, the baptized people of God in the Northeastern Ohio Synod. You have been my source of encouragement and I pray that you will also do the same for Bishop-Elect Barbins when she begins serving you in December.

Her leadership style will be different from mine. No two people are alike. But remember that the Holy Spirit is working in, with, and through her to accomplish whatever God wills for this synod.

I want to leave you with several thoughts as you welcome Bishop-Elect Barbins as your shepherd for the next six years.

First, God loves you with an everlasting love.

Second, you are instruments of God's love for others. Jesus calls all of us into the ministry of God's work in the world. As he told his disciples on the night of his farewell discourse: "*Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.*"

Our whole existence as church is based on that truth; that we are called to love as God has loved us. Let us not base our mission and ministry on anything else.

With the whole church, we, the people of God in Northeastern Ohio, are called to be the hands and feet of Christ and share in the love and abundant blessings of God.

May we respond to needs of the world with compassionate hearts.

So as my ministry among you draws to a close, let me say with the most fervent enthusiasm that it has been a privilege, an honor, and a blessing to have served as your bishop.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Peace,



+Bishop Abraham Allende