



Northeastern Ohio Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

*Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.*

[Isaiah 43:18-19 NRSV]

April 27, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ of the Northeastern Ohio Synod,

Let me say at the outset that I can never tell you enough how grateful I am for all of you and the ministry you do in Christ's name here in the Northeastern Ohio Synod. I never cease to be amazed at the creative ways you continue to share the Gospel and witness to the glory of God in all the twenty counties of our mission territory. You have been resilient in your faithfulness.

I give thanks to God for you and feel blessed to be among you as we travel this COVID-19 journey together. It has been a long and arduous path that we have walked thus far, by faith and not by sight. Yet we take a measure of comfort in knowing that the risen Lord walks alongside us, as he did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

On Monday afternoon, Ohio Governor Mike DeWine rolled out his "reopening plan," that is scheduled to begin May 1 and will involve three phases. This plan has obvious implications for us as the body of Christ. We are called to imagine what this will look like in our congregations as we ponder when we will be able to resume in-person public worship.

As bishop, my chief concern is providing pastoral care and leadership for this synod, its congregations, its people, and its rostered ministers. To that end, my principal consideration is the spiritual, physical, and emotional health of all. As I look at the demographics of our synod, it is clear that the majority of those that worship in our congregations fall into the most vulnerable age categories. 75% of coronavirus deaths occur among people 70-years of age or older.

Several of our rostered leaders have formed congregational advisory teams that include medical personnel to guide their reopening process. I have asked them to share their wisdom to guard against my making any decision in a vacuum. I thank them for their willingness to assist me in this process.

Based on the information I've received thus far; **I am asking that congregations continue the suspension of public worship throughout the month of May.** I would rather err on the side of caution than risk the safety of our faithful by being too hurried in our return. But as you contemplate reopening, the [Wisconsin Council of Churches](#) has compiled a helpful list of questions to consider.

I am sensitive to the financial stresses this has created for many congregations. We continue to explore the economic resources that are available to assist in those challenges. We post those and other information on our [Northeastern Ohio Synod Resource page](#).

As we move ahead, I will make every effort to communicate more frequently and as quickly as possible anytime there are significant changes in our medical landscape. To that end, this Wednesday, I will begin weekly Zoom meetings with our rostered ministers by conference. These meetings will include the rest of the synod pastoral team.

Here is my proposed schedule for those meetings; all begin at 10:00 a.m.:

DATE	CONFERENCES
Wednesday, April 29, 2020	Richland-Ashland, Southern
Wednesday, May 6, 2020	Akron-Wooster, Eastern
Wednesday, May 13, 2020	Cleveland East, Cleveland West, Canton-Massillon

I ask that you register in advance by sending an email to Pr. Angel Jackson angel.n.jackson@gmail.com, by Tuesday of the week your conference is scheduled to meet. She will send you a link that confirms your attendance. Also in your email, please write whatever question(s) you would like us to cover so that we can be prepared to give you an informed answer.

In the event you cannot attend one of the scheduled meetings, please let us know which other date would be more convenient. Our hope is that smaller groups will give more of you a chance to speak.

Here is additional information I bring to your attention.

Synod Assembly

The Northeastern Ohio Synod Assembly has been postponed. It WILL NOT be held on June 12-13, 2020, but will be rescheduled to a later date yet to be determined.

The Northeastern Ohio Synod Council met on Saturday and officially voted, **"To direct the Executive Committee to develop a recommendation concerning possible rescheduling of the 2020 Synod Assembly; and to instruct the Executive Committee to present their recommendation to a specially called Synod Council meeting in the next 3-4 weeks for action by the Council."**

Currently, the Executive Committee is looking at dates in August or September, and it seems highly likely that it will be a one-day assembly. The chief order of business is the election of a bishop. I have agreed to serve beyond the end of my term (August 31), until a successor is in place.

To give you some perspective, most synods that don't have bishop elections scheduled for this year, have already cancelled their assemblies until 2021. Those with bishop elections are, like us, in the process of rescheduling.

On somewhat unrelated note, the Fall Conference of Bishops, normally held the first week in October in Chicago, has already been canceled.

Other Cancellations

- [Lutheran Outdoor Ministries of Ohio](#) (LOMO) Camps have made the difficult decision to keep camps closed until further notice. Therefore, traditional summer camps will not be held in 2020.

- Our **Boundaries Workshop** for rostered ministers, a required triennial continuing education program for rostered ministers, has been canceled until next year.
- The LuTMA (formerly NALIP) Interim Ministry Training, which was scheduled for April, has been delayed until November. Normally, this would have been the first of three phases in the program.

We are all walking in uncharted territory. There are no clear cut answers. I am reminded of Tod Bolsinger's book, *Canoeing the Mountains*. We are canoers who have run out of water. It may be worth rereading that book at this time in our ministry.

It bears repeating that God walks with us through this journey. Above all, that is what guides us in this adventure.

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.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Abraham D. Allende', with a stylized, flowing script.

+The Rev. Abraham D. Allende
Bishop