

*Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*

[1 Timothy 4:12]

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

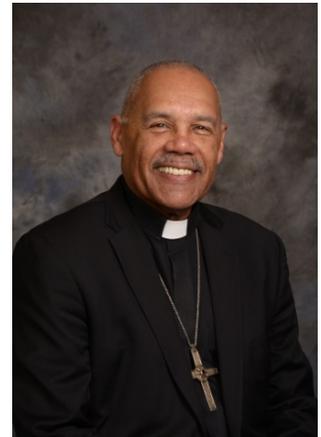
From June 24 to July 1 of this year, I spent an exhilarating week in Houston, TX, attending the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE) and the ELCA Youth Gathering.



There are not enough superlatives to describe my experience. Thirty thousand youth and adult leaders witnessed the active and vibrant presence of God in the world, in worship, fellowship and service. Gathered under the theme, “This Changes Everything,” the youngsters were guided by the verse from Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

Each night at the mass gatherings they heard a variety of speakers bring messages of hope and grace. The youngsters were inspired and empowered to strive for justice and peace in the world, to feed the

hungry, welcome the stranger, advocate for those marginalized in society and to be a voice for the voiceless. They learned that no matter what their background or circumstances, they were beloved children of God.



At the interactive learning center, they discovered the many ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America throughout the world – ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Women of the ELCA, among others.

They traveled out into the communities of Houston that were affected by Hurricane Irma and took part in service projects to aid in the remaining recovery efforts.



All 540 youth and adult leaders from the Northeastern Ohio Synod were in the same hotel along with the bishop. It gave us a greater opportunity to interact with each other and grow in relationship. We chatted

in the lobby, rode the buses to and from events, ate alongside each other and took part in the serving/learning projects together. And did we take selfies? Enough to fill a football field!

But the growth in faith was the most important highlight of the week. I would encourage any adult who knows a youngster that attended to share their thoughts about what this trip meant to them. Chances are they'll summarize their experience in three sentences: *"God's love changes everything. God's grace changes everything. God's hope changes everything."*

A lot of people put a great deal of effort into making this even what it is. There are two people whom I've come to depend on for the local coordination of all the synod's congregations. Darlene Waugh of Messiah, Fairview Park; and Pastor Kathy Kluck of First, Strongsville spend countless numbers of hours to ensure that things go as smoothly as possible. I thank God for the commitment and energy they put into this. And I thank you for whatever part you may have played in supporting the youth of our congregations in attending the Gathering.

I was so moved when I attended the 2015 Gathering in Detroit, that my priorities shifted so as to put an intentional emphasis on youth leadership. That is why those of you who've attended the last two synod assemblies have seen a greater participation of young people in our worship services and an increased visibility of youth in our assembly.

These young people have come back from Houston as changed individuals. They are hungry and thirsty for the chance to lead. It is our responsibility to give them that opportunity. Our role as adults is to nurture their potential as well as ours. The task at hand for all of us, young and old, is sharing that good news of God's salvation with others, of making Christ known in the world.

And so I offer you this challenge. Listen to the young people. Encourage them. Empower them. Get out of their way! Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit and trust in the hope that, through the leadership of our youth, our congregations may become agents of change in the world.

Peace and blessings!



The Rev. Abraham D. Allende,  
Bishop

