

Report to the Assembly of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

From the Companion Synod Committee

June 9 – 10, 2017

“Uhambisano” means “Walking Together”. As part of the ELCA’s program of companion synods, the Southwestern Minnesota Synod in 1990 began a relationship with the South Eastern Diocese (SED) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa and called it “Uhambisano”, Zulu for “Walking Together”.

What has evolved is the creation of a deeper lasting relationship and understanding of the culture, politics and visions for hope between these two church entities which lie 9,000 miles apart from each other. It can take 20 to 24 hours of plane travel to visit each other but such visits can and do take place yearly between groups of people who share a common faith and who hope to strengthen each other in hope and love.

The purpose of this mutual ministry is to strengthen our Christ-centered witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and seek ways we can assist each other in our own contexts of ministry.

We in Southwestern Minnesota Synod are very pleased to have supported the transition of the Diocesan HIV/Aids committee into a Health and Wellness Committee with a broader view towards ministry to South Africans in SED who struggle in poverty with health and nutrition. We are most pleased that the Chair of that Diocesan committee of Health and Wellness, Mrs. Witness Mbatha is present with us at this assembly along with her companion, Mrs. Ntombizodwa (Mom) Langla who is part of the Public Health Sector of the Province of Kwa-Zulu Natal. They will spend several days visiting different conferences in our synod before and after this assembly. We encourage all conferences to continue their support of this ministry.

As part of this report we would like to thank Mr. Skhumbuzo Mntambo, who has worked with the South Eastern Diocese in South Africa as chair of the Partnership committee. This committee has grown into a well-organized committee with representatives from each of the 10 Circuit Partnership committees. These Lay leaders meet together with Diocesan leaders to share and oversee the work of Partnership committees in the circuits.

In our synod, we have comparable partnership committees working and developing in each of our ten conferences.

From funds being sent to help students of every level buy uniforms to scholarships being given for school tuition fees, each conference has developed projects through consultation with their partner circuit and through visits and conferring, relationships are built and ministry is done. From visits here during theological conferences to observing harvest techniques, Minnesotan and South African become friends and grow in service and faith.

We hope all assembly attendees will visit our display to find out more about our Companions in South Africa and to seek out our visitors from South Africa who are at the assembly.

Do you know who your representative on the Companion Synod is from your conference? Find out by visiting our display or by asking the Dean of your conference. We have brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the South Eastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. “Praise God from whom all blessings flow” “Dumis’ osibusisayo!”

For the Companion Synod Committee, Marie Nelson