

Report to the Synod Assembly of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA
From 2021 from the Companion Synod Committee

In the closing of Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians he writes "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.

For a second year in a row, our companionship with the Southeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa has remained with only sparse communication and hearts aching with the deaths of friends and partners continuing on both sides of our globe. It was particularly sad that the new Presiding Bishop of ELCSA, Bishop MJH Ubane died from the Covid19 virus and then his twin brother died of the same plague only days later. Many parishes have lost numerous parishioners and Pastors are overburdened with grieving families, funerals and economic losses.

The most recent Covid numbers from the World Health Organization show that from Jan. 3, 2020 until April, 24, 2021 in South Africa 1.57 million people have suffered with the virus and there have been 54,066 deaths. A scant 182,983 doses of vaccine have been given. The South African government has a plan to have 1.2 million health care workers vaccinated and 67% of their population vaccinated at the end of 2021.

In the USA there have been 31,593,420 million people infected with the virus resulting in 564,941 deaths. In the USA there have been 202,553,704 doses of vaccines given. Many of us find these numbers obtuse and mind blowing. We have to shield ourselves from becoming numb and pray to our Creator to help us find love in spite of disastrous numbers so we can love our neighbors in all ways possible.

Thankfully, the diocese was able to hold elections and new Deans are now in place as well as a new bishop, Rev. Nkosinathi Myaka who has been consecrated in our Southeastern Diocese and slowly a new Partnership Committee and a new Diocesan Council have come into place.

In early communication with Bp. Myaka our Bishop Anderson remembered that an early decision for all of us in this partnership was to share in prayer at every opportunity.

I want to share this goal with all at our synod assembly this year. We pray that this year for us will be one of rebuilding in many ways. We pray for strength to continue in the safest strategies we all need to practice to keep numbers of new cases down especially in light of new variants, one from South Africa.

We hope every congregation in every conference of our synod will pray for those who want to build relationships with partner circuits in the Southeastern Diocese and who can become active on a conference Partnership Committee in order to explore new ways for more people to begin a relationship with our companions in South Africa. While we're still awaiting a time when international travel can bring us together in person again, we have learned how to "Zoom" together and we hope others can share in the technology that allows us to be together though we are many miles away. In fact, our Great River conference has congregations sharing video worship services with their companions in the Durban Circuit.

Every conference in our synod has a connection with one of the 10 circuits in the Southeastern Diocese. Some of our conferences have larger and more active committees. Others have only 1 or two people who have continued to relate to their partners in their circuit. We pray for those leaders to get to know members of congregations in their conferences who have interest in being involved in partnership ministry.

Deans and Pastors in every conference in our synod can point those interested to leaders of partnership ministry in their conference.

As an election takes place at this synod assembly for a new Bishop in our synod we want to express our gratitude to Bishop Jon Anderson for his help and counsel throughout his tenure with our companionship ministry with the Southeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa. We're so thankful for the relationships he has made both with us on this committee and our South African companions in ministry. His guidance has been graceful, patient and meaningful.

Let us pray without ceasing and be thankful in all circumstances through this next year as we seek to rebuild our partnership relationships.

For the committee,
Marie Nelson, chair