

Report to the 2016 Synod Assembly  
From the Companion Synod Committee

“May Our Mighty God be with you all as you continue serving Him.” This verse from the fifth chapter of Matthew was sent to us along with an acknowledgement for the receipt of funds from the Conferences of the Southwest Minnesota Synod to the Circuits of the Southeastern Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa.

As the former HIV/AIDS Committee of the Diocese has changed into the Health & Wellness Committee and Program, we appreciate this blessing and a detailed report on the work done and goals established by this group. They have a representative from each of the ten circuits of the diocese as well as Facilitator, Rev. N. Mahaye. All of these representatives have had training sessions and are organizing volunteers and programs in their circuits. Food and clothing is being given as those with needs are identified. Home visits are being made in circuits to identify those with health problems that go beyond HIV/AIDS and care is being shown so that all levels of each circuit can be drawn into service ranging from Men’s groups to the Youth Leagues to Sunday School groups. Circuits have been encouraged to form Non-Profit Organizations so they can partner with other groups in their circuits and reach out to find other sources of funding that are available.

We on this committee are grateful for all of those working in our conferences here who have sent funds to this Health and Wellness Committee in the Southeastern Diocese. As well as continuing to uphold this work in prayer, we want to encourage each conference of our synod to continue funding this Committee with yearly \$1,000 contributions. These may be sent directly to our synod office who will transfer funds directly to the Health and Wellness Committee’s account in South Africa.

The Diocesan Partnership Committee has their account set up and running so that contributions from our conferences to partner circuits can be quickly and reliably dispersed from the Partnership Committee in the diocese. Our synod office is now making transfers of funds to the Southeastern Diocese every other month. When one transfer is made from several places such as conferences, expensive fees can be avoided. We encourage contributions to be sent this way.

In 2015 our committee made a commitment to support the Rorke’s Drift Arts and Crafts Center by helping to fund salary for a full time director. This Center has a long history of not only providing employment in an area of few economic opportunities but enriching and cultivating the culture of the area by teaching and promoting pottery, weaving and silk screening. These activities continue as the board seeks a new Director. Our committee has sent the promised funding but followed that up with a request that the money be kept until a new Director is hired so that it’s spent for its intended purpose. The Fine Arts Center continues to expand its sales initiative and continues to employ artists.

Now after reporting on financial activities, we come to the more important area of our companionship with the Southeastern Diocese. Many conferences continue to plan visits and trips with their circuit partners even as drought continues to affect many areas of Kwa-Zulu Natal. More than one conference have a finely organized committee structure that communicates with its partners easily through phone calls and emails. Other conferences are growing in the number of people getting involved in being companions with their circuits and we praise God for the relationships that are shared and the friendships that spread and grow. The main purpose of our companionship in South Africa is expressed in the Zulu word, “Uhambisano” which means “walking together”. A great new experience for some of our South African brothers and sisters has been spending time, for the first time ever, at the Provincial Game Reserve, Hluhluwe-Umfolozi along with their American companions. These shared experiences that include time for conversation and planning have deepened relationships and sparked new ones. Relationships are at the heart of our walking together. We’re grateful for what we have with our sisters and brothers in the Southeastern Diocese. Let us continue walking together, sharing our faith and ministry, praying together and acting together as the hands and feet of Christ.

Please visit the Companion Synod Display while at the Synod Assembly or the Assembly of the Women of the ELCA or find out more about our companionship on the synod website.

For the committee, Marie Nelson, chair