

August 19, 2008

Dear Friends in Christ,

I've been meaning to write. How many times have I put those words to paper?! But, I really have. Now that I've been in the office for two weeks (give or take, what with all kinds of other things like Owen's Baptism to distract me!) I guess it's time that I write to you.

I am very grateful for your call to serve as bishop of this great synod. The more I become familiar with our life together, the more excited I am about the bright future of great possibilities we share. It is time for us to move forward with joy and delight at the great opportunities placed before us. We are called to bear God's witness to Jesus Christ, to say and do the gospel in our various places of ministry.

This coming weekend, from August 22 until August 25, Lois and I will be visiting in the Southwest Nassau Conference, the first of the bishop's visitations, which Gayle is ably organizing. I look forward to being with leaders of our church in their places of ministry and learning about what God is doing there. This Sunday I will be preaching at Grace and Resurreccion in Uniondale on the Gospel for the day, Matthew 16:13-20, the story of Peter's profession of faith. Whenever I hear that story, I am captivated by Peter's profession and by Peter's failures because in the tension created by these realities, I see what we all experience: *If Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, then there is hope for all of us—for you, for the Metropolitan New York Synod, and for this new bishop—because Peter remains God's chosen rock whether he is acting like a cornerstone or a stumbling block, and because he shows us that blessedness is less about perfectness than about willingness—that what counts is to risk our own answers, to go ahead and try, to get up one more time when we fall, to bear God's creative and redeeming word to all the world.*

I am pleased to be working with you, sharing the gospel of Christ crucified and risen!

Bishop Rimbo

Bishop's installation at Central Synagogue?

I'm sure that some people are wondering about that location—in fact, I've heard from a couple of pastors about my decision. Let me share some basic facts about why the installation will be at this historic place of worship.

We were invited by the senior rabbi, Peter Rubinstein, a friend of mine. There is a long history of Central sharing its space with Lutherans: Saint Peter's, Manhattan, used it when their church was being built in the mid-'70s and Central used St. Peter's after their fire in the late '90s. So it's not the first time a Christian, even Lutheran, congregation has worshipped there. We sought other likely places, and none were available: St. John the Divine is still in disrepair and St. Patrick's will not allow us to celebrate the Eucharist. We need to accommodate 800 people, and there MUST be complete accessibility for all. Places like Riverside Church were booked already. And I think we must make efforts in this synod to broaden our partnerships with other faith groups as well as strengthen our own ecumenical relationships. So those, in short, are the reasons.

I hope you'll plan to be with us on Sunday, 12 October, at 3 p.m.—with gathering music starting at 2:30 p.m.

Bishop Rimbo

August 26, 2008

Dear friends in Christ:

I'm flying high after a remarkable weekend with the good people of the Southwest Nassau Conference. I had the opportunity to meet with all of the pastors but two (who were on vacation), synodical deacons, and a great variety of lay people from all over the conference. The Saturday morning breakfast with more than 50 lay leaders from around the conference at Grace, Malverne, was enriching for me, and now I have notes from them to help shape our life together in that conference and in our synod. On Sunday morning I was privileged to preside and preach at a joint celebration at Grace and Resurreccion in Uniondale, which was a great event. It was a beautiful weekend and a wonderful opportunity for me to be on the turf of this synod, and I thank all who made it happen.

I hope to be in every conference by the time of our next Synod Assembly or shortly thereafter. Here are the dates that Gayle Ruege has begun arranging with deans:

Staten Island—Sept. 18-19, Sept. 28 and Nov. 1
Western Suffolk—Oct. 23-26
Delaware-Hudson—Nov. 7-10
Eastern Nassau—Dec. 12-15
Manhattan—January 23-25
Western Nassau—Jan. 30-Feb. 2
Southwest Queens—Feb. 6-8
Southeast Queens—Feb. 20-22 OR Feb. 27-Mar. 1
Hudson—March 29-April 1
Peconic—April 30-May 4

Other dates are in the works, so please “stay tuned” for details. I look forward to many more fruitful conversations like the great ones I had this past weekend.

Bishop Robert Alan Rimbo

“The bishop belongs to all...”

Last Thursday, 21 August, Lois and I joined with hundreds of friends in celebrating the life of Bishop John H. K. Schreiber of the Southeast Michigan Synod. John and I were colleagues on the staff of that synod, and he was my successor. Many of you know people on his staff, Pr. Cherlyne Beck and Pr. Stephen Marsh. That synod should be in your prayers during this very traumatic time, so I boldly ask you to remember them.

Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson was an eloquent witness to the grace and strength of God, which marked Bishop Schreiber's ministry and which will continue to uphold all of us who grieve his untimely death at the age of 47.

On the back cover of the service folder for “A Service of Witness to the Resurrection” were printed words from the Most Reverend Helder Pessoa Camara, retired Archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Olinda and Recife, words which reflect Bishop Schreiber's ministry and which, I pray, will mark my ministry here:

The bishop belongs to all.

Let no one be scandalized if I frequent those who are considered unworthy or sinful.

Who is not a sinner?

Let no one be alarmed if I am seen with compromised and dangerous people, on the left or the right.

Let no one bind me to a group.

My door, my heart, must be open to everyone, absolutely everyone.

Please pray for Bp. Schreiber's spouse, Pr. Colleen Kamke, their children Claire and Paul, his mother, Roseann, and his sister, Lois, and our sisters and brothers in Southeast Michigan.