

Bishop Gillin's Exhortation to the 141st Diocese of the Northeast & Mid-Atlantic of the Reformed Episcopal Church

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

The Church Militant is:

- always being promoted away to the Church Triumphant,
- always relocating and moving away due to employment, school or retirement,
- always moving from one church to another, and
- sadly, always falling away, being choked by the cares of this world.

Two key words consistently appear in the above statements – 'always' and 'away'.

The local church, because of these and other reasons is always in the process of leaving or dying.

So, the goal, according to our Lord's Great Commission, is for every church to make disciples who will reproduce themselves in the lives of others so that churches will grow, in spite of the losses noted above. This happens organically through procreation, conversions and strategically as churches mother their daughter churches. Like the common experience of humanity, the church is both simultaneously dying and birthing. If the local church is to survive, then birthing must be the priority and the predominant characteristic.

This is the strategic vision of REC100, the revitalization of existing works and the planting of new ones.

Our dear brother, Dean Eduardo Andrade has been sending his "Our Daily Scoop" to his parishioners and others since the beginning of the pandemic in order to keep in touch with people by introducing them to the daily lectionary. One, in particular, recently caught my attention. It quoted the prophet Haggai. Please hear the words of the prophet from Chapter 1, verses 1-6:

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: These people say the time has not yet come to rebuild the house of the LORD." Then the word of

the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, "Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies in ruins? Now, therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts: Consider your ways. You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. (ESV)

Most of us have heard these words at one time or another. It's clear that this post-exilic prophet is admonishing God's people for their procrastination. They had been resettled in the land, following their exile, and had grown happy with how things were. They were no longer captives and were enjoying their freedom. Unfortunately, they had neglected the priority of worship and the requirement that they worship in the place of God's designation under the Old Covenant. So, the prophet chastises them for their selfishness and neglect. They had taken care of themselves, but had neglected the building of God's Temple.

Please understand what I'm about to say and receive it gracefully. As we receive the various reports today, the financials from our Treasurer, Mr. Ron Riches that indicate a healthy balance sheet this year as a result of positive market returns and wonderful, sacrificial parish tithing, an increased enrollment at our Seminary and the Board's willingness to work with the Diocese to lessen their dependence on diocesan support, 52 persons confirmed and twelve more received by transfer or the laying on of hands in reception, and my sincere appreciation of your continued supportive spirit, that in spite of all of these positive things if God's house is built by local growth and beginning new works, we have principally failed in our mission.

Here is a graphic recently provided by the Rev. Canon Jason Grote, Canon Missioner of the Reformed Episcopal Church...

1. What do you see?
2. What don't you see?

This past summer, Jan and I took a road trip to western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio. One of our stops was the former Ohio Reformatory School in Mansfield, Ohio. This is the site of the filming of the movie, Shawshank Redemption. I understand that the film was not Christian friendly, but I had to visit. I asked Jan to watch the movie before we went and she did.

I have asked someone to model a shirt I bought. “Get busy living or get busy dying”. This statement was made by the character Andy Dufresne, played by Tim Robbins to his close friend, Ellis Redding, or Red, played by Morgan Freeman, in the movie just prior to Dufresne’s prison break.

My dear friends we need to refocus our concerted efforts on church planting. It is God’s plan for the evangelization of the world. There is no other formula for diocesan expansion. We’ve made a start. Dean Jason Patterson has been meeting with the pastors of various churches in the Diocese as a follow-up to the presentations of the Rev. Canon Mark Eldridge to the General Council meetings about church planting and revitalization.

The first priority is to repent of our inaction. So many of us, not all, have been content to maintain the status quo. We’ve set the vehicle on cruise control and if we can pay our bills, provide pastoral care and maintain the ‘program’ then we are satisfied. Contentedness led to inaction in Haggai’s day and I’m afraid has largely impacted us in our day. Revival begins with repentance and prayer.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. (Ps.127:1)

Therefore, I direct all of our churches to set aside one Sunday per quarter in the diocesan year ahead to do the following:

- Ask for God’s forgiveness for our focus upon ourselves rather than upon a hurting and dying world that desperately needs the Gospel with which we’ve been entrusted.
- Ask God for a willingness to let go of everything that stands in the way of building His holy temple – The Church.
- Then, ask God to open our eyes to opportunities for ministry to our communities and lovingly respond.

I will be holding a series of meetings with the diocesan leadership to strategize and develop an action plan for church revitalization and planting in the Diocese. We will draw upon the available resources from REC100 and tailor the effort to this Diocese.

This plan will be communicated to the regional Deans, who in turn will meet with the rectors and vicars in their deaneries to develop individual church plans for internal growth and outreach.

I challenge each of our rectors, vicars and churches to make church revitalization and planting a priority in your teaching and preaching responsibilities and pray that God will interweave this priority into your ministries. I also direct that this Exhortation be read in our churches in a Morning Worship service this month. It will be available for download from the Diocesan Council link on the new website.

This Reformed Episcopal Church has so much to offer. As the Psalmist has written in Psalm 16:6, *The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have beautiful inheritance* (or in the KJV – goodly heritage). If we truly believe the words of our Savior, “...greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4), then nothing can stand in the way of Kingdom building. I dare not write that the time for action is now, because it has always been so. However, this is a defining moment in the life of our Diocese. If the Lord tarries and the delegates to the 150th Council of this Diocese in 2030 look back at this decade, what will be said of us? Will it be that we got busy living or got busy dying? My vision, which I trust you share, is that this Diocese will plant so many churches from Maine to Maryland that everyone will know of the faithful witness of the Diocese of the Northeast & Mid-Atlantic of the Reformed Episcopal Church to the glory of God.

We began with Haggai’s prophetic admonition to the resettled exiles to, *Consider their ways*. Knowing that the Lord is with us, may our response be as theirs,

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him. And the people feared the LORD. Then Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke to the people with the LORD's message, “I am with you, declares the LORD.” (Haggai 1:12-13)

Let us pray.

FOR THE CHURCH

O GRACIOUS Father, we humbly beseech thee for thy holy Catholic Church; that thou wouldest be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, establish it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of him who died and rose again, and ever liveth to make intercession for us, Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.