

Bishop Jenkins' Exhortation to Diocesan Council

In my exhortation for this year, we are going to look toward the seminal parts of the plan for the life of the diocese going forward.

I can't give you the whole plan today, it is just too long, but we're going to talk about the foundations of it and the work of the church and the work of our parishes, and the broader work of the diocese

We are all laboring in support of four things.

1. Parish clergy. The very first obligation that a parish has is supporting its minister. If you can't do that, you need to make a plan so that you can get to a place where you can. In some cases, that plan is going to mean you have a bi-vocational minister. Your rector or vicar, and possibly his wife, are going to be underwriting the work of the parish. But it really needs to be the other way around.
2. The support of the diocese. Written into our canons is that each parish pays the 10% tithe that funds the work of the diocese. That money also helps fund the work of our Seminary. The Seminary is an important work because if we don't have it, where are we going to send our men to be trained? Yes, there are other places where they can go, but this is our Seminary, run by our men, governed by our clergy and laity. It has our imprint. It may not be perfect, but it's ours to fix.
3. Supporting church planting and revitalization through REC100 here in the Northeast.
4. Supporting the Board of Foreign Missions around the world.

These are the works that are ours.

To support these four items, we currently have 23 churches and missions. It's my goal to reach 40 congregations in the years ahead.

During the weeks and months that I was recovering last year, I had an immense amount of time to pray and agonize over what it is that God wanted me to do in the diocese. Because frankly, I must tell you, I didn't feel like I was off to a very good start. But this trial was what I needed.

Many of you have heard me say over the years, "God knows what we need for our salvation". And I know this; I needed that time. God used all the pain, all the fear and all the heartache. He used it to kill some things in me that needed to die and to grow some things that needed to be strengthened.

The goal that He put in my soul was that we need 40 churches that are tithing to the diocese at least \$10,000 each. Some of our churches are doing a lot more. And for this we can give thanks to God. But some are not there yet.

In addition to the 23 congregations that we have, we need to add 17 more. That will get us to where we are almost supporting our budget. If it takes us 15 years to get there, our budget is probably going to be bigger then, so we're going to have to be even more aggressive

This time next year we may already be at 25, we have two parishes that are looking to come into NEMA. The two parishes are looking to come in right now. We're in serious conversations with them. That may be a good start, because frankly, if we're going to get 15 more churches in the next 15 years, if we start by adding two in the first year, that's encouraging.

The truth is that church growth is not all about numbers. Of course, it is all about numbers, in certain parts of the church growth industry. There are a lot of ways to measure success in the Church. However, you can see that on Pentecost numbers were something pretty important. 3000 people were converted in a day. Then every day thereafter God added to the church those that would be saved.

We are not measuring only numbers. Let our measurement be of our own humility, confession, and repentance. That's where we're going to begin.

OPPORTUNITYISNOWHERE

What do you see above? Some of you will see one thing, some of you will see another. Opportunity is nowhere, or Opportunity Is Now Here. What you will see is dictated by your perception. 65% of all viewers read this as “Opportunity is nowhere”.

Perhaps you've heard the phrase that perception is reality. That's true, sort of. However, if your perception includes the concept that gravity is not real, your perception may lead you to jump out of a plane without a parachute. But even though you perceive gravity does not apply to you, your perception is about to get a reality adjustment.

Nevertheless, our perceptions do affect the way we see reality. When Saint Paul wrote the epistle to the Philippians, one of his major themes was having the mind of Christ. Ten times he mentions this theme. It is an important part of his perception. It is the mind of Christ that makes us live and look like Him. It is the thing which makes us see eye to eye with one another. It helps us work together. It helps us to rejoice with those that rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Ford Motor Company has resurrected a famous quote about perception from their founder Henry Ford, “Whether you think you can, or think you can't. you're right.” Our endeavors and our thoughts, our perceptions, work together to help us accomplish our goals. This concept is rooted in the Scripture.

“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he”, Solomon said. Jesus repeats, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” “A godly woman opens her mouth with wisdom, and on her

tongue is the rule of kindness” says King Lemuel. In short, what you are on the inside, will dictate who you are on the outside. What you think about is what you will become. It is also what you will do.

When it comes to the growth and health of our diocese, what are we thinking about? Where are our opportunities? I remember one of my first Councils that some of our rectors stood up to speak. The first one bemoaned the fact that his church was in BaptistVille. “Have you ever tried to grow an Anglican church in BaptistVille?” he asked us.

Then another young man stood up. With a little bit of disdain in his voice he said “I would love to have some Baptists on my street. Our parish is in a place of nearly perpetual crime, violence and drugs.” Both men saw no opportunity for their parish.

Listening to these two young men, reminded me of a story I had heard long ago. There were two brothers, twin boys, whose parents fell on hard times. Eventually the mother died from drunkenness, and the father went to prison for murder. The two boys grew up in foster care and later in life were interviewed by a news reporter. Ironically one of the brothers was in prison for dealing drugs. The other brother was a successful businessman and pillar of his community. When the reporter asked each of the young men, “What do you think was the driving force that impacted you to become the man that you are?”

Each of them replied, “Just look at my parents. How else could I have turned out?” Their perception impacted their lives greatly.

There is a sense in which our perception, how we think, how we communicate in our own spirits, directs our mind and our actions regarding how God works in us in the ministry. When I think of the two young rectors, both of which revealed the lack of opportunity in their neighborhood, I'm reminded of the statement that 1/2 of all professing Christians do not attend church regularly. While 100% of all unbelievers do not attend church at all. The opportunity was all around them just as it is for us: both with the unchurched and the under churchd.

For us to move forward, we have to ask ourselves the question that is found in the prophecy of Ezekiel, “How shall we then live?” or, What are we supposed to do in light of our opportunities and our obstacles?

Anglicans have famously used the 3-legged stool. The concept is of something that is sturdy. We identify each of the legs as scripture, reason and tradition. These are the ways, the filters, the categories in which we think about our faith and how we interpret it. We think about these things in terms of good support, as well as good strength. That is the very principle of a three legged stool. Or, in Biblical terminology, the three stranded cord. It is strong. It is not easily broken.

But I want to introduce us to another paradigm of a three-legged stool. The legs represent different things. These are elements which have been with the church, and by which the church has grown explosively over 2000 years. It was the church father's paradigm for personal growth,

parish growth, and church growth. Each leg represents a different key virtue. They contribute to Christian growth as much now as they have for 2000 years.

LEG ONE: FASTING

Our first leg on this stool you'll see is Fasting. Our church observes set days of fasting throughout the year. the great fast of Lent, the lesser fast of Advent, and the Ember days, at the quarter marks of the year. We are reminded by Jesus himself that fasting is expected. Jesus does not say “if you fast”, but “when you fast”.

It is his plain understanding that fasting is a part of the Christian life. There is no doubt that it was a part of the life of Christ. And we certainly find him modeling it, and patterning it, for his disciples.

Let us be clear, however. Fasting can be done the wrong way as we see in Isaiah 58. You can fast and it will have no effect on the work or the ways of God. Thus, it should be incumbent on us to be certain that when we fast, that we are doing it right. Not as the hypocrites of Isaiah 58, or the hypocrites we see in Matthew chapter 6. Fasting the right way always includes some discipline, and deprivation, but is energized by confession, repentance and humility. Without them, we are missing the point.

The gospel account of Jesus casting out a violent demon, certainly gives us a perspective on fasting that we would not otherwise get. The gospels record for us that Jesus and the disciples had been away alone. When coming down off a mountain, a father and a mother come and plead with Christ to have compassion on them, to heal their boy, because this violent demon would tear the boy and make him thrash. If he got near water, he would throw him in. If he got near fire, he would throw him in. Their lives were just wrecked. They said, “We brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't cast him out”.

Jesus did have compassion on the family, and he did heal the boy, and cast that demon out of him. His disciples came to him later and said, “Why couldn't we cast him out?” Jesus said, “This kind does not go forth without fasting and prayer”. Some things cannot be done in the Christian life without fasting, and apparently the more difficult the deed, the greater the need for the servants of God to fast as they pray.

Most of you are familiar with the term Didache, which means, the “teaching”. This 1st century Christian document circulated around the Christian communities and was a summary of Christian life and virtue. It is well worthwhile to read, depending on your reading speed it only takes 30 to 45 minutes. You could certainly read this once a month as it gives us an interesting perspective on 1st century Christian life and faith. Even though we don't know the author, it certainly falls in line with most of what we would understand about Christian ethics.

It mentions specifically that we are not to fast like the pagans on Mondays and Thursdays, but instead, Christians fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. We should always employ the Lord's

Prayer as it was critical during the fast. Additionally, the “Our Father” was to be prayed 3 times a day, every day.

When you fast, maybe you can't fast the whole day. That's all right, we start where we are and we go from there. Perhaps you can start by fasting midday. Perhaps you fast breakfast, or breakfast and lunch, and then sit down and give thanks to God for your dinner. But during the day, as the hunger pains come, as the discipline sets in, and the desires for things that are good are repressed in order to gain the things that are better - each time that hunger comes, say a prayer. Pray for your parish. Pray for those who are on the prayer list to come to Christ. Pray for your diocese. Pray for all your bishops.

Fasting, one of the three key elements of Christian virtue.

LEG TWO: PRAYER

We now come to our second leg which goes hand in hand with fasting, and that is prayer. Typically, fasting is almost always paired with prayer. However, it is not so in reverse. Prayer often occurs without the act of fasting, because it takes on different forms. We have our common prayers that we pray in the liturgy. We also have prayers that we pray by ourselves. The prayer book makes certain that we do not inhibit the right of extemporaneous prayer. Paul talks about a form of prayer, saying that we should pray without ceasing. Our lives should be one of prayer at all times. We should give thanks in everything, both adversity and prosperity. Then the scriptures speak also of a more earnest kind of prayer, sometimes called wrestling in prayer. That's actually what Paul calls it when he talks about Epaphras in Colossians 4:12.

Depending on the English translation, this dear friend of Paul's is said to pray with fervency, wrestling, struggling. Oftentimes this is connected figuratively to Jacob wrestling with the Yahweh Angel on the night before he was reunited with Esau. He wrestled, the Scripture says, and he would not let Jehovah's messenger go. “I want a blessing”, he said. The concept which we see in Jacob's prayer is very similar to what we see in the prayer of Epaphras. The word which Saint Paul uses when he talks about this is the word from which we get our English word agony. We are often inclined to think of our communion with God as “the sweet hour of prayer”, the place where we find grace and mercy, the place of comfort and the place of peace.

But Paul says there is a place in prayer where we agonize with God over the needs of his church, or the needs of our parishes, over our own needs as clergy and laity.

We hear from the gospels how Jesus sweated as it were great drops of blood in His agonizing prayer. It calls us to pray with perseverance - setting aside a time to pray with no interruptions, Time that is unhurried.

Fasting and prayer form for us 2 legs of our stool.

LEG THREE: ALMS

If you think talking about fasting and prayer is unpopular, then you really won't like what comes next. The third leg on our stool is that of Alms, the giving of that which is beyond the tithe. RG LeTourneau, inventor of all kinds of large earth moving machinery, began giving 10% to God early in his life. By the end he was giving 90% and living on 10%, and he still was a multimillionaire.

But you can't start your almsgiving at 90%, because it takes a faith that you won't have. It takes patience, it takes time and growth if you're going to get there. It's going to take you a while.

And this is one of the themes of what I'm saying here today. A church is not built in a day. And the truth is, as we've come to see in so many disciplines of home building and office building, The faster something is constructed, the less sturdy it is.

One of the premier stories of almsgiving is related to the poor widow and her two mites. Jesus was standing across from the treasury and watching the rich throw in their bags of money. Then along comes a poor widow woman. She makes money the way that the poor and oppressed have made money since the beginning of time. She has very little to put in, but she puts in all that she has. That's not to say she wasn't going to be able to make some more next week, but her prospects of making more money were very slim. She would never make very much. It appears she was old and whatever her skills may have been, her body kept them from being entirely profitable for the people she worked for.

Nevertheless, she put in what she had. Therefore, Jesus commended her because she gave out of her penury. She gave out of her poverty. She trusted God for the rest.

The work of church growth and revitalization needs support. But what it needs even more is our sacrifice. There is nothing to be afraid of because you can't out give God. God is not going to be a debtor to you, because you gave so much and he only gave a little back to you. I mentioned RG LeTourneau. He used to say, "I keep shoveling the money out, but God keeps shoveling it back in - and his shovel is bigger!"

We need to make it a priority to give to the work of church planting and revitalization. We do this through our REC 100. Or you can give directly to a church plant if that is how God leads you to do it. But when it comes to the third leg of the stool, there's something here which we're not necessarily entirely comfortable with. God lays claim to all of our money, Yes, we can keep 90% of it, but even of that God says, "When I call you, I need you to recognize that all of that is mine. I give it to you as a steward to care for the time being."

As we think about the future of our diocese, I want you to be thinking about these things; specifically fasting, prayer, and almsgiving. These are the virtues that have defined saints for the ages, and they should define us as well. They will make us better saints, and better saints are what bring the gospel to the world in a better way.

So, will these three things grow our churches and our diocese?

LIFT UP YOUR EYES

There are yet some things we must do. "Lift up your eyes" Jesus said. We need to be of one mind with Him, as St. Paul instructed the Philippians. We need to see the world the way that He sees it. As the one who is not willing that any should perish. We need to lift up our eyes and catch His vision.

It is a simple physical proposition that where you are looking is where you will go. That's why when we learn to drive, we learn pretty quickly to keep our eyes on the road. If we don't, we're going to end up in the cornfield, or over the cliff, or in the river. Where you focus your attention, that's where you're going to be inclined to go.

We need to see the vision of the world the way God sees it.

GO INTO THE HIGHWAYS AND HEDGES

Then, we must go. Go out into the highways and hedges. Go out and beat the bushes. Go into all the world!

But let's remember not to skip our neighbors, the folks up and down the street. Go to the street where you are - the street where your church is. Most of us could not fit all of the people on our street in our church. But do we know them all? And do they know us? You don't have to be a Bible thumper. You don't have to beat them over the head with the gospel. Just put on your cassock, go knock on the door and introduce yourself. Say "I'd like to pray for you. Is there something that you have I could pray for?" and then pray for it. Make sure you write down their name and follow up. "Hey, how are you doing? I've been praying for your mom, for your wife, for your husband, for your child, for a job or whatever it is. How's it going? If you get good news, that's great. If not, keep praying.

Then find out if there is anything else you can pray for. It is estimated that it takes between 12 and 15 contacts to entice people to come to church. Lifeway Christian books (who are also now in the research business) says the number one thing that still gets visitors to church is a personal invitation.

As Christians we must make an effort at reaching out and we have to plan to do it pretty much every day when we get up in the morning. No general goes to war without a plan. The same is true for sharing the gospel. If I don't plan to talk to somebody about Christ, it's not going to happen by accident.

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

But we must do more than look. More than catch the vision. We must go into the highways and hedges and *compel* them to come in. And this is the simple reason why: "*That my house may*

be full.” This is our goal. No matter how large the House of God is where you are serving, the goal is to fill it up.

Once you do so, then you can make some more decisions: two services? building expansion? plant a new congregation? support a congregation that is forming?

IF YOU CAN'T MEASURE IT YOU CAN'T IMPROVE IT

Let us consider another of our Lord's parables. The master who went away for a long time and left his goods in the hands of his servants. It is required of a steward that he be found faithful. The most significant theme here is faithfulness. Hear the words of the Master, *“Occupy till I come.”*

However, there are some other themes, too. One of them is that the Master was gone for a long time. During that period, two of the stewards were busy. You know the result, they doubled the money entrusted to them. However, the one took his one talent and then he occupied himself, too. But in a very different way. He went out and dug a hole. Then he fretted over that thing. He watched over that thing. He made sure no animals dug up and no kids got into it. He made sure it wasn't found by mistake or accident. He worried and worried himself to death until the master came back. But for all his effort, he was a wicked and slothful servant.

What can we learn here? God is happy if you can double what He entrusted to you. Your parish, whether you are clergy or laity is what God has given you. Maybe it's larger, maybe it's smaller. Take what God gives you and make it better. But also remember the principle of time. You can do anything if given enough time. Developing a successful church is not going to happen next week, next month, and probably not going to happen next year. But remember, most of us overestimate what we can do in a year, but underestimate what we can do in a decade.

What if it takes you your entire ministry life to get that church doubled? That's great, and you've done what the parable dictates. But there are many ways to measure the work of the Holy Spirit in a parish. Some of those measurements are intangible. You measure it by marriages saved that were in trouble. Or, by the wanderers that have been reclaimed. You can measure by the faithful giving of your parish. Measure by the number of men who are trained for ministry, but we've got to be measuring.

OPPORTUNITY IS NOW HERE

The Gospel is just as powerful in the converting to the hearts of men as it ever was. And God is just as interested in the saving of souls as he ever was.

We've been entrusted with our talents.

God has counted us faithful.

The fields are white for harvest.

We have the precious seed.

I will close with this illustration. As a boy I thought I was pretty tough. The reason why is because when I got my cavities filled, I didn't take Novocaine. Right about now, I'm sure you're thinking, he wasn't tough, he was stupid! Granted! In truth, I was scared. And I had a butcher for a dentist. So, I would grip the arms of the dentist chair until my knuckles were white!

Eventually, that dentist moved away and I got a new one.

He that knew what I needed and wouldn't let me get a filling without pain killer. "Billy", he said, "it is just a pinch. Then you sit for a little while and you won't feel a thing." He was right. Give it time, and it will always work.

The Gospel is the same way. It has the ring of truth, because it is true! Men may say they don't believe it, but all men know the truth when they hear it. We just have to be faithful in always putting it out there, and then we must give it time. Just like Novocaine, it always works.

Let us renew our commitment to fasting, praying and almsgiving, the virtues that have invigorated the Church for two millennia. Let us pursue the mind of Christ. Let us see the world through His vision. Let us set goals and occupy ourselves until we attain them. Then at the last, to hear "*Well done, good and faithful servants.*"

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. AMEN