Episcopal Exhortation

145th Council or the Diocese of the Northeast and MidAtlantic

October 5, 2026

Repentance and Blessing

The best time to plant a shade tree is 20 years ago. The second-best time is now. In our diocese, we have started planting shade trees. What we have begun, will by God's grace, bless our children and our children's children. This is not to say we were not doing this work before I became bishop. But we are starting to get a new perspective on what happens in a diocese when planting starts. "A rising tide lifts all boats". Even parishes that have been weak and struggling are starting to catch a new vision. In our time together, we have heard from St. Paul's in Oreland, St George's in Hamilton, Good Shepherd in Carlisle, and St. Matthew's in Havertown. Next year I would like to include more of you. We need to hear each other's ideas. We need this encouragement.

We are the oldest diocese in the REC and we are also the smallest. It is good to take stock of what that means. In 1990, this diocese had 43 parishes. Between the five parishes that were given to the Central States in 2008 and other parishes permanently closing their doors, we were reduced to 23 as of 2024. This is a precipitous drop! And virtually all of us have contributed to it in one way or another. When it comes to humans, there is a tendency for weakness to accompany age. This is generally unavoidable. But it is entirely possible for a diocese to grow stronger - both through revitalization and fresh planting. By God's grace, that is where NEMA is heading.

My exhortation this year is built upon the structure of last year's exhortation. If you were here and cannot remember last year's exhortation, I would like to use this year's to build upon last year's foundation. Some practices in the Church are timeless and cannot be improved upon.

I said to you in 2025 that the foundation of a Christian's life is prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The truth is, with an entire year gone by, none of that has actually changed. Our lives are still built upon these three practices. They are the essence of faithfulness. They have been the characteristics of our Faith for 2,000 years. Why should we have any desire to abandon or to substitute any one of them with lesser replacements? My exhortation to you in 2026 is an elucidation on the first of these-an encouragement to deeper lives of prayer.

Andrew Murray, in his Christian Classic *The Ministry of Intercessory Prayer*, wrote, "It is important to talk to men about God. It is imperative to talk to God about men." His summary of the work of prayer in these two lines speaks volumes about his faith. It is a belief based on the fact that salvation is of God. It is not of us. Indeed, I believe that Rev. Murray would contend that we could talk to men all day about God, but without God's intervening work

of Grace, we would be wasting our breath. I would concur.

And, yet, I hear Christians say all too frequently, "We tried prayer – and nothing happened."

I would submit to you, any saint who "tries prayer" and has the sense it has not worked, likely needs to pray more. It for this reason that we are enjoined by Christ to "pray and not faint". The parable that Jesus tells us in conjunction with these very words indicates that the person who does not faint in the work of prayer will receive their petitions. For our judge is NOT unjust. Nor is he uncaring. Our Judge not only has the power to grant our petitions, but he is willing to do the same. In fact, "*His eyes are always upon us, and His ears are ever open to our cries*". Does not our own liturgy instruct us that "He is more willing to hear, than we are to pray"?

This is not just a warm and fuzzy sentiment bequeathed to us from our Anglican ancestors. Our God promises us, "**Before** they call I will answer"; "**The Spirit helps us** in our infirmities"; "Because **He hath inclined His ear to me**, I will call upon Him as long as I live?"

It is eminently clear that our God is far more willing to hear than we are to pray. Thus, if any deficiency lies in the matter of prayer, it is with us, and not with the Almighty!

"You have not, because you ask not.", St. James chides.

Does not the prophet Isaiah weep over the apathy residing in us when he laments, "*There is none that calleth upon Thy name, that stirreth himself up to take hold of Thee.*" (Is 64:7) Surely God waits upon His throne for the faithful, persistent, and unrelenting prayers of those who come and will not be denied.

Praying and Waiting

But this brings us to a second consideration in our prayers: God rarely answers us the first time we pray. When our children were little, many of us had a policy about significant gifts for them. Rarely was anything purchased right away. They had to wait. Like Ralphie in the "Christmas Story", they had to ask perpetually and regularly. We wanted some indication that this was not just a passing fancy. In some fashion God operates the same way with us.

He requires the persistence of the afflicted widow with the Unjust Judge.

But listen to His promissory caveat: "*Shall not God avenge his own elect who cry day and night unto Him, THOUGH HE BEAR LONG WITH THEM*?" Or, how about the determination of the man who went to his neighbor at midnight pleading for a loaf of bread? Hear the words of Christ at the conclusion of this parable from Luke 11: "*Ask, and ye shall receive." "Seek, and ye shall find". "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you*." There has never been a saint who has ever diligently asked and has not received. Nor sought and did not find. Never has any saint knocked at the Gate of Heaven and found it was closed to him forever.

The plain intimation is that God requires us to be persistent, unrelenting, to take hold of

Him in prayer, to cry out, "*I will not let you go unless you bless me*." So then, it is with clear understanding that we read the analogies of speech that urge us to understand that prayer is wrestling-Genesis 32 and Ephesian 6. We understand sweating in prayer by our Lord Jesus in Gethsemane. We recognize the word used of the afflicted widow, that she "troubled" the unjust judge, is the word for **smiting, beating down, pounding upon an adversary**. It speaks to us of the evils which stand against us in prevailing prayer, and how we are to view prayer as their defeat, and our means of battle. For this reason St. Paul says to be, "praying always" at the conclusion of his great passage on the warfare of prayer and the armor of God.

Additionally in this vein, St. Paul reminds us to "Pray without Ceasing". What does he mean by such a phrase? St Basil the Great, the 4th century church father in Cappadocia, wrote it this way: "Thus will thought pray without ceasing; if thought prayest not only with words, but unitest thyself to God though all the course of life, and so thy life be made one ceaseless and uninterrupted prayer." In short, prayer is to be our first response to everything. In success or failure, riches or poverty, winning or losing, let prayer be first and defining of our whole existence.

And having begun in prayer, never let it cease. David and Daniel say that we should set forth times of prayer thrice each day - morning, noon, and night. This is our life. This is our custom; this is our example from Scripture.

Lastly, let us remember that our first order in all prayer should be confession. It is this act which re-opens the way to the Throne of Heavenly Grace. But too often we fail to see our own need for confession until after we have already spent considerable time in prayer. This is the case for Daniel, whose life was a stellar example of all that we have been discussing today. Like King David before him, Daniel, too, was inclined to a structure of prayer three times each day, and other times as the Spirit of God moved upon him. Let's take a short look at how Daniel, after numerous "victories" comes to the conclusion that what is needed now is not prayer over the enemies in the political realm, but over the internal struggles where repentance begins.

After the three great battles of righteousness over evil:

1. Daniel's faith in refusing the kings' food
2. The Three Hebrew Children defeating the hellish fires of Nebuchadnezzar
3. Daniel surviving the lion's den

The prophet comes to a place where he recognizes the **priority of repentance**. In closing, let us read from Daniel Chapter 9. It is his great prayer of repentance for both himself and God's people. I hope it will instruct us, convict us, and move us to cry for the mercy of heaven this very day.

To set the stage a little further, Daniel and the Judean Hebrews have been carried away into Babylon. They sat down by the rivers and wept when they remembered their home. Their enemies mocked them by telling them to "sing the song of Zion!"

Daniel now joins this prayer. While no sin is recorded for him in the scriptures, he acknowledges his own faults as part of the reason they have been displaced - just as we must acknowledge our own. He repents for the king, the princes, the fathers and all the people. This is a great corporate act of contrition. It reminds us that **we are all one**. That we are responsible one for another. No man is an Island.

In our time, we talk often about the sins of our own nation. We seem to have an understanding that the judgement which befalls those around us, will also affect us. But it's not just the sins of our nation that plague us, it is also the sins of our Church. We will not be spared by a separation of these institutions. We will be spared only by repentance for our sins. And just because others may sin differently than we do, that doesn't make us less guilty.

> "I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.
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> O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that are* near, and *that are* far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. O Lord, to us *belongeth* confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that *is* written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him. And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. *it is* written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God *is* righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.
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> And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our

sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people *are become* a reproach to all *that are* about us. Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name."

Recommendations

1. That we begin our new year with confession. Advent is one of the two great seasons of Repentance. "Let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God" as we prepare for the Celebration of Christ's birth.
1. That every parish not contributing to the seminary set aside $50 monthly to begin support.
2. That every Rector and Parish support the REC-100 Lenten offering for our domestic planting and mission.
3. That all members of NEMA devote three times of prayer each day for the life and work of the Church. 1200 members x 3 prayers daily = 3,600 prayers a day for this work. In a year's time this would total 1.3 million prayers. As you pray, I ask you to intercede specifically for the following:
    a. Bishops
    b. RES
    c. REC-100 and Diocesan Plants
    d. More laborers for the harvest
    e. BFM
    f. Your own parish and rector

God bless you all.

+Bill