

Exhortation – 144th NEMA Diocesan Council

The Blank Canvas

There are many activities offered where we live. Some are run by the retirement community and others by fellow residents. A resident offers free art classes. Jan has attended these and on one occasion brought home two beautiful seascapes. She told me the artist offered initial help by placing some items on the paper to give the participants a bit of a head start. The artist saw me afterwards and said, “You have a budding artist in your family”. Since I immediately knew it was not me, otherwise known as Mr. Stick Figure, that only left Jan. Jan and I were speaking about her paintings and I asked her, “What do you think you would be able to do with a blank canvas?” That question got me thinking about my own situation as bishop and the work of the church.

It would be wonderful if I were able to leave Bishop Bill Jenkins a blank canvas - all the major issues addressed and problems solved. Every bishop wants to do his best to leave his successor a blank canvas, but that is rarely possible. When Bishop Riches retired as our Diocesan, issues remained. When Bishop Hicks resigned as our Diocesan, issues also remained then. And now, as I anticipate retirement, I look around the Diocese and I see things I had hoped to address and resolve, still strewn across the landscape. The canvas is by no means blank! Make no mistake, we have dealt with many issues these last several years, but we continue to struggle with difficulties that cause a bishop to lose sleep. I wish it were not so, but this is the reality and I wonder if the nature of the church is such that it's impossible to ever hand a fellow bishop a blank canvas?

The Church always has its issues. We recall the ministry of the Apostle Paul. How surprised he must have been when he received the report from “Chloe’s people” about all of the problems at the church in Corinth? How angry he must have been when he anathematized the Judaizers in the church at Galatia and suggested they should perhaps castrate themselves due to their false teaching about the necessity of physical circumcision for Gentile believers? He was surely disappointed when he wrote Timothy about Demas, who had deserted him and Alexander who had done him great harm. Please pray for Bishop Jenkins because not only is he inheriting issues I could not fully address, but others will surely present themselves during his time as your bishop.

I strongly suggest to my dear brother that he surround himself with mighty men as the biblical David did. Fellow clergy giant killers who have proven themselves time and again, who are not afraid to enter the fray and stand back-to-back with him when surrounded by the enemy. He will be blessed by the strength and assistance of many strong men and women, but that smaller group of close, reliable counselors will help him stand when his knees begin to buckle under the weight of the mantle he is about to bear.

Many of you are aware that before the resignation of Bishop Hicks that I was planning to retire. I had served as his suffragan for eight years, preparing to help sell the family business and planning a move to Quarryville, PA. We are living in Quarryville and the family business has been sold. However, retirement from Episcopal ministry was not God’s will. It’s just another reminder of who is in control of our lives. This Council elected me as your Ordinary in November 2020. I began my ministry as Ordinary on March 28, 2021. I communicated then that I viewed my role as a bridge

from Bishop Hick's ministry to your next, younger bishop and that is where we are today. It has been, as so many of you know a real struggle in many areas, but God is good. There's never been a time when I've not felt His presence through the power of the Holy Spirit. I praise God for a faithful and sacrificial wife and the mighty men He surrounded me with to do the work of a bishop. I notified the Standing Committee at their October 12, 2023 meeting that Lord willing, I planned to retire as the Ordinary of the Diocese on December 31, 2024.

My statistical report, required by the Canons, has been posted on the diocesan website and is available in your Council packets. As I look back over my time as your Diocesan, we have made progress in several areas that I wish to highlight.

Diocesan Communications – Quarterly NEMA News releases and regular diocesan announcements and prayer updates have helped keep us closer as a family. Mr. Greg Wright has done a wonderful job in compiling and issuing these releases. Every rector and vicar were asked to compile an email list of their congregants so these could be electronically forwarded to them. Some pastors and/or staff members have faithfully done this, but regrettably, others have not. This grieves me, not because of the effort that goes into preparing these releases for your benefit, but primarily because all our people need to know what is happening in the Diocese so they can pray, participate and feel included. In addition to these regular communications, Mrs. Holly Howden and Dean Jason Patterson worked tirelessly to construct and launch our diocesan website. It is attractive, informative and comprehensive. We thank them and Mr. Greg Wright who now monitors and updates it.

Clergy Wives Confidential Prayer & Praise Emails – Recognizing the indisputable fact that women are better communicators than men, my wife Jan began this ministry to alert the clergy wives about specific prayer needs and praise items. It follows the example of the confidential emails sent to the ACNA bishop's wives that was begun by Mrs. Meg Guernsey and continued by Mrs. Karen Love. It has been well received by our clergy wives and I thank Jan for the encouragement she has provided as a result of this ministry that has further benefited communication in the Diocese.

Daughters of the Holy Cross – The first diocesan chapter of the Daughters of the Holy Cross was begun at Faith Church in Baltimore, MD. Prior to their induction, the ladies met for instruction and discernment. Their induction into this prayer ministry was held on Sunday, October 9, 2022 at Faith Church. Canon William Jenkins and I participated in the service. Members of the St. Elizabeth Chapter in South Carolina were present to welcome and present these newest members. The inducted members of the "Faithful Daughters" chapter were: Sandra Alsrue, Meagan Bohlen, Chee Cox, Shirley Fisher, Jan Gillin, Allison Gillespie-Jenkins, Kim Jenkins and Emily Marble. It's an encouragement to know that these ladies regularly pray for diocesan and other needs.

Reformed Episcopal Seminary – Our theological institution has undergone monumental change. The Rev. Dr. Jonathan S. Riches resigned as President and Dean and also from his professorship. He was granted a fully-paid year's sabbatical by the Board of Directors. Dean Riches has had a distinguished career at the Seminary serving for 24 years, eleven of which were as Dean and of those eleven, four years as President and Dean. A Resolution in his honor, outlining his faithful service and accomplishments, will be presented during the report of the Theological Seminary

later this afternoon. The Board of Directors elected the Rev. Cn. Dr. Matthew P. Harrington as the institution's next President and Dean. He and his staff have been faithfully carrying on the work of the Seminary, including the move of the school to this location at St. Paul's Church in Oreland, PA and preparing the sale of properties at the former Blue Bell, PA location. Our thanks to them for their faithful labors. The composition of the Board of Directors has also undergone a significant transition indicated by a more than fifty-percent change in its membership.

Church of Our Redeemer – Jersey City, NJ – I salute the members of this African-American church for their courage, perseverance and commitment to this Diocese. Their fortitude reminds me of the verse from Amazing Grace, "Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home". The Lord has indeed brought them through difficulties including the vestry dismissal of a rector who was accused of abuse. The legitimacy of those claims was upheld by a canonical Board of Inquiry, chaired by Chancellor Matthew P. Harrington. The church fulfilled all of its financial obligations to the minister, but was subsequently sued by him. His lawsuit was dismissed by the court with prejudice. They also had to deal with the disqualification of a promising candidate whose educational credentials were proven to be false by the careful work of Dean Jason S. Paterson, serving as chairman of the Examining Chaplains. Many thanks to Dean Jerry McLynn for his leadership and the Rev. Justin Forsberg who regularly traveled to the church to preach and serve the Lord's Supper. Now with the ordination of the Rev. Chester R. Banks and his call to serve as pastor, there is a brighter day on the horizon for this parish.

St. Mark's Church – Rydal, PA – A Chinese church plant is progressing under the leadership of Dean Jason Paterson and the Rev. John Liu. Dean Paterson continues to mentor Rev. Liu in the Anglican Way in preparation for his ordination in the Reformed Episcopal Church. On Saturday, January 20, 2024, Dean Patterson baptized eighteen candidates, most of whom were adults. On Sunday, January 21 forty-two candidates for confirmation were presented to me for the laying on of hands. Twelve of these candidates were from the congregation of St. Mark's Church and thirty were from the Chinese congregation. The church has completed a capital project to construct a new entrance and welcome suite off of the parking lot. It is close to obtaining all the necessary clearances.

St. Luke's & Bishop Hoffman Church – Philadelphia, PA - An ESL program is being held regularly at this mission as a Front Porch ministry. The ministry is overseen by the Rev. David A. France and the Very Rev. Jason S. Patterson and the classes are being conducted by Mr. & Mrs. Chris and Naomi Morris, members of St. Mark's Church, Rydal, PA. The classes have continued to grow and are now comprised of many different ethnicities averaging around 30-35 weekly participants. In addition, a Chinese community outreach effort meets regularly at the church under the leadership of the Rev. John Liu. Significant repair projects have been completed at the church with the help of Chinese Christians, under the watchful eye of Mr. Ron Reese.

Grace Church – Scranton, PA – The revitalization of this mission church has been a great encouragement to everyone associated with it. When the Rev. Michael D. Blitz resigned, to accept

a call to St. John's Church in Ventnor, NJ, initial vestry discussions centered around preparations to close the church. Now, vestry discussions are dominated by ways to reach out to better serve the community and the people of the church. There has been a complete turnaround in attitude, baptisms and confirmations have increased dramatically and a spirit of joyful anticipation dominates discussions. Their engaging annual fall conferences provide a bridge to the community. I thank the Rev. Jared Lovell, Minister-in-charge, for the vital role he has played in the turn-around effort. I also thank the vestry leadership and the Rev. William G. Garrison who travels to the church twice each month to serve the Eucharist.

St. Paul's Church – Orelan, PA – Several years ago an attempt was made by the rector and vestry of the church to withdraw from the Diocese. With the valued assistance of Archdeacon Jon W. Abboud and the Very Rev. Jason S. Patterson and others, this attempt was thwarted. The church's membership rolls no longer met the canonical threshold for a parish, so the Standing Committee designated the church as a mission and the Vicar was dismissed. Subsequently, the Very Rev. Canon Matthew P. Harrington agreed to serve as the Interim Vicar and relocated his family to the St. Paul's rectory. Concurrent with this activity, the plan to move the Seminary campus from Blue Bell, PA to St. Paul's' Church was initiated as Canon Harrington began his duties as President and Dean. In addition, pastoral adjustments needed to be made at St. Alban's Church, New York, NY which are noted below. We all owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to Canon Harrington and his wife Susan for their willingness to undergo these significant life changes and for the many sacrifices they have made that have benefited the Diocese, St. Paul's Church and the Seminary. Canon Harrington is assisted by the Rev. Dr. Dale H. Crouthamel and the Rev. Stephen Atchison.

St. Alban's Church – New York, NY – This parish leased its property at 51st and 1st Avenues to an agency that serves Autistic children. The congregation leased and renovated a property located at 45 Tudor City Place in New York City. It sits between 1st & 2nd Avenues above E. 42nd Street across from a public park and in the shadow of the United Nations.

On September 9, 2023 I met with the church vestry at the rectory. The groundwork had been laid by the Rev. Canon Matthew P. Harrington to help prepare the vestry members for his departure as the resident rector. At that meeting, the vestry voted unanimously to call the Rev. Michael Fitzpatrick as Associate Rector. His official duties began on October 1, 2023. Canon Harrington agreed to continue as Rector and to represent the church's interests and attend the Zoom meetings of the condominium association.

On July 7, 2024 the church held a farewell for the Rev. Mr. Fitzpatrick. He had agreed to move back to the Collingdale, PA area to assist the Rev. Shawn Riley in ministry at Grace Church. Rev. Fitzpatrick had served this parish for many years prior to moving to Ohio. We are glad to have him back ministering in this Diocese. Dr. Dennis Wermert and Mr. Timothy Meadows, Postulant, have been serving at St. Alban's Church by reading Morning Prayer and preaching in Canon Harrington's absence. He visits the first Sunday of each month to preside at Holy Communion.

In addition to the above, please note the following:

The Committee on Young People's Work – This Committee continues to conduct summer and winter camps for our young people. The camps are held at Rock Mountain in Susquehanna, PA. We are indebted to the Chairman, the Rev. Billy Jenkins and teachers, counselors and helpers who assist him. Some camps have ministered to over 80 young people. May the efforts of these faithful laborers produce fruit unto eternal life.

Good Shepherd Church, Harrisburg, PA was received into our diocese by transfer from the ACNA Diocese of Pittsburgh on June 6, 2021. The Rev. Ricky McCarl serves as Vicar. They have been meeting in the chapel of Zion Lutheran Church in the city and shortly anticipate the purchase of a church building in Carlisle, PA.

Under the leadership of the Very Rev. Eduardo Andrade, the congregation of Good Shepherd Church in South Easton, MA was able to purchase the building in which they had been previously meeting as renters.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Jason Holloway, the Church of the Atonement, Philadelphia, PA received a \$10,000 grant from the ACNA Matthew 25 Fund for community outreach and a \$38,000 grant from the City of Philadelphia for kitchen renovations. The vestry is in the process of selling the property of the Church of the Messiah in order to further advance the ministry in Germantown.

Under the leadership of the Very Rev. Eric Jorgensen, the congregation of St. Stephen's Church, Eldersburg, MD completed a renovation of its sanctuary.

Under the leadership of the Rev. Frank M. Spadafora, the congregation of St. Peter's Church, Elkton, MD has completed exterior renovations to the church.

In all of these endeavors, I served as overseer and advisor. The work was done by committed people with vision and drive who prayerfully leaned on the Lord. The new Archbishop, the Most Rev. Steve Woods has emphasized the need to recognize and support the congregations in our dioceses. This may seem rather obvious, but it can't be emphasized enough. The episcopal office does not exist for you to support it, but for it to support you. You, the people of God worshiping and serving locally, are the ones at the heart of growth in this and any other diocese. I can't count the number of times individuals approached me and said, 'Bishop, want do you think about this?' This was usually followed by wonderful Kingdom-related accomplishments. I had little to do with the planning and work. It was all done locally and my role as the spiritual overseer of the Diocese was to faithfully pray, advise when necessary and stand back and watch God work through His people to do the work of ministry. What a great blessing to have served as your Suffragan and Ordinary and see this happen time and again.

I offer these special notes of thanks. To Mr. Greg Wright for faithfully serving as Communications Director and for his good work in coordinating these Councils. To Mr. Ron Riches for faithfully serving as diocesan Treasurer. It is said that church financial ministry is a thankless job. However, if done sacrificially, honestly and forthrightly, it is not a job, but a much-appreciated ministry. Ron has ministered to this Diocese and we owe him a debt of gratitude for overseeing the finances in a

decent and orderly manner. I thank Mrs. Sara Patterson, diocesan Secretary, for assisting in the financial affairs of the Diocese with the collection, deposit and reporting of funds to our Treasurer and for her careful attention to the compiling of the Minutes for our Councils. I thank Archdeacon Jon W. Abboud for serving with me as the Archdeacon. I knew of his giftedness and implored him to serve again in this capacity if I were to be elected Ordinary. Thankfully he agreed and all of us have benefited from his faithful service. I would also like to thank my regional Deans who have served so faithfully during my tenure. They are the Very Rev. Eduardo A. Andrade – New England, the Very Rev. Cn. Matthew P. Harrington, New York, the Very Rev. Gerald S. McLynn – New Jersey, the Very Rev. Jason S. Patterson, Pennsylvania and the Very Rev. Dr. Eric W. Jorgensen - Maryland and Delaware. I've also appreciated the good leadership of those who have served on the Examining Chaplains. Dean Patterson, the previous Chairman, and Dean Jorgensen assembled ordination questions and codified procedures. The Rev. Justin M. Forsberg is serving as the current Chairman. The Rt. Rev. William A. Jenkins, Sr. has assisted me in every aspect of episcopal ministry since his consecration. He has eagerly and willingly shared in this ministry and has continuously encouraged my heart. Speaking of hearts, for the past nine weeks, the bishop's medical condition and surgeries have been on our minds and he and his family in our prayers. His wife Kim and his family have suffered along with him. Cardiac rehabilitation is in his future, so he is not yet physically able to be with us or participate in the scheduled service of Institution. Presiding Bishop Ray Sutton has postponed his fall visit and is planning to be with us this spring for the Institution. We look forward to that time and Lord willing on January 1, 2025 our dear brother will become your Bishop Ordinary. Bishop Jenkins is a godly man who understands the role and responsibilities of the episcopate. We all look forward to the masterpiece that God will help him paint. I wish the canvas presented to him was had few less marks on it, but trust that God help him become like the former television landscape painter, Bob Ross, and create, out of those markings, something beautiful.

Pastor's wives have one of the most difficult ministries there can be. The call of God has come upon clergy men and even though the wives are not ordained, God surely provides spiritual giftedness that allows them to stand with us and share in the challenges of ministry.

The Rev. George Whitfield and the Rev. Charles Wesley didn't always agree. One of Whitfield's followers said to him, "We won't see John Wesley in the heaven, will we?" Whitfield humbly replied "Yes, you're right, we won't see him in heaven. He will be so close to the Throne of God and we will be so far away, that we won't be able to see him!" I'm convinced that this will also be my experience with my dear Jan in glory. For 47 years she has stood with me while I served in ordained ministry, the last 13 while serving as bishop in the Church of God. There's a good reason why many African Anglicans call their bishop's wives, "Mama Bishop". It's a testimony to the vital role bishop's wives play in support of their husbands and service to the Kingdom. Jan has accompanied me on nearly every one of my 152 episcopal visits to date. I can count on one hand the number of times she could not be with me. In fact, when I've made those few visits without her, the first question was always, "Where is Mrs. Gillin? We had so hoped to see her and miss her!" One would think that congregations look more forward to seeing the bishop's wife than the bishop! My wife has faithfully supported me by being a true friend, wise counselor and a strong

support when I have stumbled. I cannot begin to thank her enough for loving and serving me and the Church of Jesus Christ. I now give opportunity for this Council to also show your love and thanksgiving to her.

It has been my great privilege to serve this Diocese in the Episcopal Office. While serving as the Suffragan to Bishop Hicks for eight years I made 83 visitations, confirmed 139 persons and ordained two, with the permission of the Most Rev. Ray R. Sutton, while he served as our Interim Bishop. While serving as your Bishop Ordinary for n five nearly years, I made 72 visitations, confirmed 180 persons, issued 25 Lay Reader licenses, ordained ten men to Holy Orders and set apart one Deaconess. My hope and prayer is that in all of these endeavors God has blessed our works begun, continued and ended in Him and glorified His holy Name.

The Ephesian elders wept when the Apostle Paul told them that they never see his face again. Hopefully, we will see each other's faces many times in the future, but not in the same capacity. One of the worst things a resigning or retiring rector can do is to attend the church he just left. It's never a good idea. Even though I will still be a bishop in Christ's Church, nevertheless, my authority as the Ordinary will soon end and any future authority I may exercise in this Diocese, will be derived from your new Ordinary. I know Bishop Jenkins also has your love and respect and as you have so faithfully supported and encouraged me, he will count on you to do same as he serves you. I love all of you dearly in Christ Jesus and thank God for the great privilege I've had to serve you.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who will surely do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Respectfully submitted,
Bishop R. Charles Gillin