



THE BISHOP DIOCESAN PRO TEMPORE OF NORTH CAROLINA
THE RT. REV. ANNE E. HODGES-COPPLE

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Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sound the alarm on my holy mountain. Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. (Joel 2:1; 2:15)

Dear People of God,

Lent is fast approaching. And I use the word *fast* intentionally. Fasting plays an important role in the individual and corporate preparation for Holy Week and Easter. In a paradoxical way, fasting is a way of strengthening ourselves for the spiritual journey. Jesus was first weakened by his 40-day fast in the wilderness, even as it helped prepare him for the times of testing ahead.

Lent is a fitting time to refrain from some practices not because they are harmful – if that is the case, the practice should be put away for good – but as a way of opening up places of emptiness in our lives. Empty places – quiet and open – create a special hunger and, therefore, receptivity to the presence of God. This Presence is what upholds us and sustains us in times of testing.

As a nation we are in a season of particular testing given the deep divisions and disputes being played out at almost all levels of society. From our dining room tables, the halls of government and our pulpits, voices cry “foul” and dispute what is fair. We may feel bombarded from all sides of the “aisles,” sullied by political rhetoric, and/or devastated by the dismantling of protections for citizens and the environment.

The temptation of this season of discontent is to cry out and then tune out: a grand sign-off from Facebook, after restating one’s firmest convictions, or a refusal to turn on the news – and then signing into the latest Netflix Original Series.

But Lent is not a time to turn back or turn away from the sins of the world; instead, it is a time to confront the sin of the world by being brutally honest about the sin that is within each one of us. Lent is the call to deeper self-awareness of the mote in my eye before I offer shrill criticism of the speck in my sister’s eye. It is a time to examine the “heart” of matters at a hand: what evil lurks in my own heart and what concerns are the closest to the heart of God.

With this in mind, I want to call the people of the Diocese of North Carolina to be more mindful than ever of how we are responding to the needs and concerns of the most fragile members of our communities: the hungry, the homeless, refugees, immigrants, children and the poor. Let us remember that our neighbors are far and very near. *Let us choose the fasts and other disciplines that free up the space in our lives and resources to act with more intelligence, intention, kindness, self-awareness, humility and less fear and judgment.*

Let us act, speak and especially listen in ways that open hearts and always model respect for those with whom we disagree.

The recent executive order from the President concerning the travel ban for travelers from seven predominantly Muslim countries provides disciples of Jesus an excellent opportunity to discuss and discern biblical imperatives of reconciliation as they are lived out in our current context. Let us engage as Christians in efforts to balance the imperatives throughout the Old and New Testaments to welcome strangers and love our neighbors as ourselves, with the responsibility of our civic leaders to protect communities from those who wish to do violence to the United States and undermine our most basic values.

If you are still pondering a focus for your Lenten reflections and disciplines – as an individual or a community yearning to follow Jesus - I want to commend to you the [resources we've assembled](#) around issues facing residents of other countries who are fleeing terrorism, war and other life-threatening deprivations, as well as providing for refugees and other residents already here and eager to become contributing members of our various communities. In these resources you'll find not only information, but concrete suggestions and steps to take, all of which fit easily into a Lenten structure.

I am deeply aware of how anxious and troubled all Americans are about the current climate of acrimony that seems to divide us rather than unite us. I am also firmly convinced that study of scripture and tradition guided by the wisdom that comes from above will illumine a path of discipleship, allowing us to “walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God.” (Ephesians 5:2).

Blessing upon you as we, the people of the Diocese of North Carolina, continue this journey together.

Yours in Christ,
+Anne

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.