

10 DAYS OF PRAYER

From July 11 to July 20, 2012

In preparation for, contemplation of and participation in
The Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference



This devotional is a call to prayer and contemplation of the task to which we are all called: bishops, delegates, staff, visitors, and all NEJ congregations. Each day's meditation and prayer is aligned with the theme and Bible Study for that day.

Our prayer is that you are blessed as you go through this ten day devotional.

The devotional booklet was written by the laity of the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference, coordinated by The Rev. Dr. Heasun Kim, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference, and edited and prepared by Ms. Hudda Aswad, Chair of the Program and Arrangements Committee and The Rev. Laurel E. Scott, Chair of the Worship Committee.

Our Eyes Look to the Lord

Read Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come? (Psalm 121:1)*

**WED
JULY 11
2012**

There may be times in life when we feel beaten, bruised, and burdened by those who seem to find great joy in your struggles. In such circumstances the words of the Psalmist could be stating just what you're thinking. In verses three and four the Psalmist says: "*The Lord will not let your foot be moved, the Lord who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, the one who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*" *The Message* version of these verses may more appropriately describe what you're thinking. It says: "We have been kicked around long enough".

You may be ready for the Lord to step in and do a number on your enemies, but before you react, look to the Lord. Before your camaraderie with the Psalmist in the last two verses goes too far, stop and reflect on the first two verses of the Psalm for more Godly advice. He tells us, "I lift my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven."

Where do you look when you are tired of being picked on? Where do you look when things are not going your way? Where do you look when you are frustrated with life and feeling like you have been "kicked around enough?" Are you ready to fight back? Are you ready to get revenge? Are you ready to set the record straight? The Psalmist probably felt the same things when he said, "I lift my eyes to you, to you whose throne is in heaven". But before he demanded revenge, before he lashed out, and before he settled into a state of perpetual self-pity he said, "Lord I lift my eyes to you..."

In Psalm 123: 2 the Psalmist gives similar advice: "... our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us." The Psalmist tells us how long to wait: "until he has mercy upon us." As servants of God we are to wait for God to deliver His mercy to us. It is not for us to determine who gets revenge. It is our task to wait for God to act and show his mercy.

Look to the Lord Jesus. In him we see the best way to respond as followers of Christ to people who "kicked (us) around long enough." Peter, who was a witness to the contemptible way Jesus was treated, writes, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." (1 Peter 2:23)

Prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God teach us how to wait on you for your mercy. Amen

Mary White, Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference

CALLED BY GOD'S FAITHFUL LOVE

Read Psalm 107:1-9

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress; Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, (Psalm 107:6,8a, NRSV)

**THUR
JULY 12
2012**

In the United Methodist Church, being “called” by God is largely referred to in the context of being called into the ordained ministry. Only rarely does one hear a lay person refer to her/his service to God as beginning with a response to a “call”.

However, I think that being called can also be found in situations where someone, lay or clergy, has asked for God’s guidance. Perhaps the person’s issue was whether to submit her/his name for delegate election at last year’s annual conference or whether to teach a Sunday School class or whether to take an action on a social issue. Subsequently deciding to submit one’s name, teach the class, go on the march, can be described as a “call” to service.

Any consideration of a call, leads to the following questions:

- 1) WHO IS CALLED?
- 2) WHY IS GOD CALLING?
- 3) WHAT DOES GOD SAY TO US?
- 4) WHAT IS THE RESULT OF THE CALL?

1) WHO DOES GOD CALL IN PSALM 107?

We read that He has gathered persons “in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.” As we gather in Charleston, we have indeed been called from all geographical directions – but, I think, we are called not just from different geographical directions, but also from different philosophical, political, emotional and cultural directions.

2) WHY DOES GOD NEED TO CALL US?

A simple glance at our society answers that question.

God has the compass and we need direction. God needs to get our attention. We get ourselves in really difficult situations, really big trouble, and then God calls. Of course, to receive God’s call we must first answer and then we must LISTEN. We must make ourselves open to hear what we did not expect; to follow where we did not intend to go.

3) WHAT DOES GOD SAY IN HIS CALL?

God calls us to give thanks – because He is good; because His steadfast love endures and sustains us forever; because He redeems us from trouble. He also calls us to call on Him. He knows we have wandered and gotten lost, hungry and thirsty, and so He directs, “Call me.”

4) WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN WE HEED THE CALL?

God will remove our stress. We will see clearly the correct path before us. Our prayer of “Thy will be done”, will be in our hands supported by God’s love. He will be faithful in that support and will never let us travel the path alone.

Prayer:

God, in the prayer we lift to you today, we give thanks to You for the ways You meet our daily needs; for Your constant, unshakeable love for us; and for calling us in the midst of our chaotic daily lives. You call us to call You back for help and guidance. Then You call us to listen. We quietly say “Amen” and in the following silence, we feel Your love and we listen.

Lynn Caterson, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference

CALLED TO A HOLY MOUNTAIN

Read Hebrews 12:22-29

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire.(Hebrews 12:28-29)

FRIDAY

**JULY 13
2012**

In my work I often hear stories of how boring things are. Students will often tell me how boring they think a particular course or professor is. My colleagues will tell story upon story of the latest tedious meeting. Unfortunately, I also see this attitude in the church. Conferences (general, jurisdictional, and annual) are dull and tiresome. People complain that we waste time and money, and we're not doing "the real work of the church."

There's a saying that goes "you get out of things what you put into them." I've found that phrase to be true about most of life. I've noticed that when people come to worship, meetings, or conferences expecting good things and positive experiences, that's usually the outcome. Even when the agenda is long, the work is challenging, or decisions don't go our way, the difference in attitude can still produce a very positive experience.

In this scripture reading we are reminded God invites us into God's presence. It's intimate, and it is holy. This is not a time when God tells us that nothing unclean can touch the holy mountain. Even with our bad attitudes and underwhelming expectations, God is preparing to do something great, and God welcomes us to be a part.

What might happen if we came to the 2012 Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference truly looking to encounter God? What if we came believing we were called to God's holy mountain, anticipating God to be present, and expecting God to do something miraculous?

As we seek ways in which to make our connection more vital, we need each other. We need power that only the one whose voice can shake Earth and Heaven to their foundations can provide. Vital disciples who form vital congregations and create vital connections know and expect these powerful moments from God. Episcopal ballots and nominations for general agencies don't always feel like the holiest or most exciting tasks, yet they play a critical role in our connection and in our ministry to all God's children. If we are going to be successful in our mission, let's come anticipating God to work a great work among us.

Remember the sacredness of this mission and this time as we gather for the 2012 NEJ Conference. We will get out of it what we put into it. If we approach as if we are called to a holy mountain for the sacred work of God, God will bless our time and our efforts.

Prayer:

Almighty God, thank you for calling us to this holy place at this time for your holy work. Move among us with power so that we are renewed and prepared for our service in the world.

Scott Johnson, Upper New York Annual Conference

OUR PAST HELP GUIDING OUR FUTURE

Read Psalm 78: 1-7

We won't hide them from their descendants; we'll tell the next generation all about the praise due the Lord and his strength – the wondrous works God has done...This is so that the next generation and children not yet born will know these things, and so they can rise up and tell their children to put their hope in God – never forgetting God's deeds, but keeping God's commandments. (Psalm 78:4, 6-7, CEB)

SAT

JULY 14
2012

I lived in England for several years during the 1980s, and was impressed with the way the British view history and their part in it. Visit houses in Britain, from the large manor homes to those on the “new” (meaning post-1900) estates, and you will find people happy to tell you of the history of their home. Many of the improvements in the historic homes were planned by someone who would never personally see the finished product. They began the work, knowing that the benefit was for future generations.

My three children come from a long line of United Methodists on both sides of their family. From their civil-war era great-great-great-grandfather who was a circuit rider in Illinois, to great-grandmothers on both sides who grew up in parsonages and, though vowing not to, married Methodist clergy and raised their children in parsonages. They have heard witness of those who spoke out for social change and were criticized, of the “prince of the pulpit” who built large congregations, of the moving (sometimes in boxcars!), of life-long friendships, of the sacrifices of those who followed a call to carry the Gospel when it wasn't the easy way. These are part of our family's story. These stories shape who we are and how we know who God is.

I have been a delegate to Jurisdictional Conference three times, and each of my children has accompanied me, as delegates or as a youth observer. This year my son, Connor, joins me on the West Virginia delegation. He is a Yale Bulldog now and it is a blessing to watch the way his faith development has shaped his decisions as he maneuvers his way through college. My eldest daughter, just completing her first year as a commissioned elder, will be serving as a monitor as we do our work.

All this has me thinking about the “construction” that we are doing at Jurisdictional Conference. The blueprints that we make, the elections we have, the stories we tell, are not just for our generation, or even for that of our children, but for the next generation and children not yet born. As I prepare myself for the Conference, I recognize my place in the line. My role is to tell the next generation about “the praise that is due the Lord and his strength – the wondrous works God has done.” Our work together will build the framework that will allow my grandchildren (not yet born!) to tell the future generation to put “hope in God - never forgetting God's deeds, but keeping God's commandments.” May it be so!

Prayer:

O, God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come...

You have brought us to this place, at this time, to continue to tell your story that shapes our lives. May the work that we do, and the witness that we share, all point to your glory and power...

From everlasting Thou art God, to endless years the same.

Judi Kenaston, West Virginia Annual Conference

THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS

Read: Luke 9: 57-62

*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him,
"I will follow you wherever you go." (Luke 9:57)*

SUN

JULY 15
2012

Church, every day is full of decisions...
*wake up or hit the snooze button,
whole grain cereal or pancakes, bacon and eggs,
dress for comfort or for style,
go to the gym or eat another cupcake,
turn on the TV or spend time with the family,
go to work or call out and enjoy the day?*

Sisters and brothers in fact, life is full of decisions and some of these decisions will determine the course of our life. Who will I marry? Where will I work? Where will I live? What church will I attend? What college will I attend after graduation from high school? For a lot of us our decision of what to do will be made up of comfort and to what cost will all of this cost me in the long run?

Church our scripture shares that two thousand years ago those who wanted to follow Jesus faced a similar dilemma. As the men were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Nevertheless another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Brothers and sisters many of us, when we first embraced that relationship with Jesus had the attitude, "*I will follow you wherever you go.*" We did everything that we were taught as a young Christian. We went to Bible study, Sunday school, youth group, choir practice, joined the outreach/evangelism ministry, and even signed up to help with the soup kitchen at the church. But, that is until we realized His call on our life could lead us to places we'd never expected to go and cost us more than we'd ever expected to sacrifice. And church, there's nothing comfortable about Jesus' calling on our lives today. The decision remains the same: will we choose *our comfort zone* or will we *take up the cost and follow Jesus?*

Prayer:

Almighty God, many times it is hard for us to follow you. And we understand that there is a cost to follow you. Today we are asking that you take us back to where we first believed. Help us with the areas in our lives that we struggle to choose comfort over what your plans are for our lives. Help us to take the step of faith follow you once again. In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Demetrio L. Beach, Delaware Annual Conference

ENCOUNTER GOD

Read Luke 9:28-36

“This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” (Luke 35b)

<p>MON JULY 16 2012</p>
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My cousin recently gave me a gift – a photo album of me as a child. Most of our family pictures were lost in a flood many years ago. I was so surprised to see this blonde-haired little girl that was me so many years ago. Well, life happens and we all change.

The Transfiguration story is about our *watching* the changes that take place in Jesus – our *waiting* go see what happens, our *listening* for God’s voice and finally our *learning* so that we may tell the story to others. Does it sound familiar? Don’t we all grow? We watch and imitate, we wait for something to happen, we listen to voices of authority and we are learning all the time.

Many things are going on here but let’s focus on verse 35; “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” Listen to him!!!! Believe in him! Love, serve, and obey him– “Hear him.”

This week we will hear many voices. We will be watching changes that have taken place in people we have not seen in a while. We certainly will be waiting to see what is going to happen. Hopefully we will be listening for God’s voice and finally we will be learning lessons that we may keep for a lifetime.

May this be a time for us to listen for that still small voice among so many – the voice God’s chosen one.

“O wondrous sight! O vision fair of glory that the church shall share,
which Christ upon the mountain shows, where brighter than the sun he glows.
The law and prophets, there have place, two chosen witnesses of grace;
The Father’s voice from out the cloud proclaims his only Son a loud.
And faithful hearts are raised on high by this great vision’s mystery;
For which in joyful strains we raise the voice of prayer, the hymn of praise.”

Sarum Breviary

Prayer:

Holy God, upon the mountain you revealed our Messiah, who by his death and resurrection would fulfill both the law and the prophets. By his transfiguration enlighten our path that we may dare to suffer with him in the service of humanity and so share in the everlasting glory of him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, forever. Amen

Patricia A Morris, Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference

QUALIFICATIONS OF BISHOPS

Read 1 Timothy 3: 1 – 7 (The Message)

(Please note that while this scripture is copied verbatim from The Message, the reader is encouraged to substitute gender-inclusive language.)

“...But there are preconditions: A leader must be well-thought-of, committed to his wife, cool and collected, accessible, and hospitable. He must know what he’s talking about...”

**TUES
JULY 17
2012**

There must be “preconditions” for anyone placed in authority.

The scripture tells us that a leader must be “well-thought-of” which should go far beyond popularity or “charm.” In this sense doesn’t “well-thought-of” bring to mind “admired by peers” and “sought out for wisdom and fairness” within the Church?

The scripture also requires a potential leader to be a faithful spouse. Not only should a potential leader honor his or her wedding vows, but they should understand the balance needed to be faithful to ALL their ministries including the ministry of family. If one neglects the holy union blessed by God for the sake of other ministry needs, has this person been a “committed” spouse?

To be “cool and collected” implies that even in the heat of a moment the potential leader finds the calm assurance of God’s presence and guidance. Not “measured and calculating” but rather filled with the peace of God which really does pass all understanding!

To be “accessible” one must be humble. Understanding that each and every person God brings into your life is a child of God and that even a bishop can learn daily from the least, the last and the lost.

When I consider “hospitable” I cringe a little at the over-used “radical hospitality” we hear about. Does the candidate treat all people with the same hospitality? Is the volunteer youth worker given the same loving greeting as the visiting General Secretary from Nashville? If not, why not?

Finally we come to “He (or she) must know what he (or she) is talking about...” I believe we overlook this at our peril as a denomination. If we are looking for bishops who can lead us where we say we want to go isn’t it logical to require that they have already “been there” in their ministry? To lead they MUST know what they are talking about! We are putting great emphasis as a church on growing vital congregations. If we are choosing leaders who can lead us to “growing” more vital congregations, can they possibly lead us without having done it themselves?

If a candidate hasn’t actually grown a “vital congregation” during the course of their ministry do they meet the “preconditions” we are setting for the denomination?

We need to get beyond popularity contests and regional pride and look to the ministry fruits of all our candidates with an eye toward the same metrics they would use to evaluate clergy if elected. You can’t lead someone to a place you have never been!

Prayer:

Lord, deliver us from politics and pride. Help us to choose leaders who have already been where you would have us go. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Tom Price, Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference

ENABLED BY GOD

Read Luke 9:10-17

*“He took the five loaves and the two fishes
and looked up into heaven and blessed them
and broke them and gave them
to His disciples to set before the crowd
and all of them were satisfied. “
(Luke 9:16 DSB)*

**WED
JULY 18
2012**

In this very familiar miracle story we find Jesus needing some time to be alone with His disciples so they journeyed to Bethsaida. However, as the people discovered where He had gone, they followed him in large numbers. But as the story unfolds, we find Jesus showing love and compassion for them instead of resenting the invasion of his privacy.

The people were hungry and even though they had some food with them, they were utterly selfish. This miracle shows what happens when people are moved by Christ and are then enabled to share. In Jesus everyone's needs are supplied.

As I have reflected on these verses of scripture one of my favorite hymns, “Spirit Song”, seems to speak to me of how we too are needing to be fed, maybe not physically, but spiritually.

“O let the Son of God enfold you
with his Spirit and his love.
Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul.
O let him have the things that hold you,
And his Spirit like a dove
will descend upon your life and make you whole.

Jesus, Oh Jesus, come and feed your lambs.
Jesus, Oh Jesus, come and feed your lambs.”

Prayer:

Jesus, our prayer is that as we have gathered here, you will be in our midst and we will be fed and enabled to be your servants in this process of selecting candidates for a special role in our United Methodist Church.

Zedna Haverstock, Susquehanna Annual Conference

EMPOWERED BY GOD

Read Luke 9: 1-6

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.*
(Luke 9:1-2)

THUR
JULY 19
2012

There are a lot of demons in our world, and sometimes we face these demons and really don't recognize them for what they are. One such demon is fear. Fear of the unknown; fear of the upcoming event; fear of new experiences; fear of speaking to a person; fear of a coming day; fear of being alone; fear of not be equipped to handle a situation; and fear of not living up to expectations. These are just a few, but you name the situation or circumstance and there is a very real possibility that fear can be attached to it. One such situation that I faced on a number of levels was the fear of losing. Having played college sports and then going on to practice law in the very aggressive, winner take all, arena of Federal litigation, I am often faced with challenges where in the midst of my preparation, the demon of fear juts out its eery head and distracts me from my focus.

What I have learned and adopted is that when this demon of fear of losing arrives, I tell myself that when I am afraid I never win! If fear controls my actions, that means I have given into that demon – no matter what the outcome. So, using what has been given to me to expel fear from the picture allows me to focus on the goal at hand and not be driven by the fear of losing. I know that just like when the twelve were called together and given power and authority over all demons, I too have that power and authority. Defeating the demon of fear and focusing on what God can do, and what God through Jesus Christ allows us to do, means that demons, come as they may, will have no place in your life. We as children of the Risen Christ are equipped with power and authority over all demons so that we can live and spread the Good News, doing so without worry or fear of those demons that would detract from what God would have us do.

We are equipped with all that is needed to do marvelous works, addressing that which is here and yet to come. In fact, God tells us, just as Jesus told the disciples, go out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and take nothing with you. We can go on the journey knowing the all we need will be provided. Knowing that we are given power and authority by the One who stilled the waters and raised Lazarus, we can remain confident that we must spread the Good News, make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the World without fear or hesitation.

Prayer:

Loving God, allow me, this day, to fully accept the power and authority you provide against any and all demons. I thank you for these gifts and I know that you are more than enough, if I only allow you to use me. Amen.

Frederick K. Brewington, New York Annual Conference

ENGAGE THE WORLD

Read Luke 9:37

With God, nothing is impossible (Luke 9:37)

FRI
JULY 20
2012

We live in a world of limits – limited time, energy, and resources. Limits are used to justify our choices and options every day. “We can’t...”, or “it isn’t possible...” depict the limits we have allowed others to place on our creativity, our imagination and our faith. Actually and metaphorically, we regularly rob Peter to pay Paul because of real and imagined limits.

That same world also yearns for the spiritual wisdom and guidance that *with God, nothing is impossible*. With due respect for keeping our feet on the ground and being realists, the faithful also know beyond a doubt that the vision of God is always possible.

Fortunately, the stories of God’s signs and wonders have been passed down through the ages – Noah’s dove and rainbow (life will continue), feeding the 5,000 (or more!), and Paul’s blindness that became new sight. Today, children are changing the world (Thanks Disney!) and young adults are conducting online fundraisers for cancer research. God finds ways to do God’s work, already moving beyond our churches and into the lives of the “unchurched”.

How many miracles will it take to convince us of God’s power? Of God’s desire to be part of the whole world and not just the interior spaces of sanctuaries? Are we ready collectively and individually to be part of God’s redistributive, sustainable economy?

Believing “anything is possible” means our expectations that we have the right answers may also need to be questioned. Our facts and our assumptions may not be God’s current truth and God may already be more active in the world than we realize!

What if God is expecting us to be “possibility advocates”? Can we speak a truth of limitless possibilities to the world? Will we speak and act in ways that affirm all as children of God? Will we advocate for consideration of projects, endeavors or ministries that others say are impossible?

If nothing is impossible for God, than anything IS possible. The blind see, the lame leap for joy. We are cast free from our prisons – of pride, of security, of unhealed hurts. God’s love supersedes all our limits because anything is possible. That knowledge inspires each of us to show the world the ways we are living our faith.

Here are three possibilities that could change the world. First, let’s begin to say “God bless you” when we would typically say “good-bye”. Second, let’s respond to every idea we hear, regardless of its merits or believability, with the words “May be possible!” Third, find or purchase something with the UMC logo and begin to wear it publicly and regularly. These are possible and faithful action steps to begin to engage our world on a personal and daily basis. Are you ready to believe in God’s possibilities?

Prayer:

God of all possibilities, Transform the limits I place on my life with faith in Your possibilities, that my actions and words become instruments of hope.

Bonnie I. Marden, New England Annual Conference

As we leave this Conference our prayer is:

Heavenly God, our Protector,

As we begin our descent from these beautiful mountains, physically but not metaphorically, we ask that you continue to guide us.

We have been *Empowered* by you to go out into the world we call our neighborhood to be your ever present witness. We have *Encountered* you through worship, discernment and each other. Now we are being sent out to *Engage* the World in your name. You have given us the means to do your work, now as we go out, give us the words to speak so that others may hear your Word of Life.

As we board planes, trains and automobiles to begin our journey back to our physical homes we pray that our travels are safe, and we pray for the courage to spread your Gospel in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, knowing that you are always with us.

We ask all of this in the name of your son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

AMEN

Hudda Aswad, Chair, Program and Arrangements Committee, NEJ