

The Bible Challenge for Bishops



- By the Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie, Rector of Christ Church Greenwich in Greenwich, CT, Founder of the Center for Biblical Studies and The Bible Challenge
www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org



One of the early Church Fathers wrote, “As the bishop goes, so goes the diocese.” A bishop’s stature and example can inspire thousands of people towards spiritual growth.

Studies show that the number one way by far to develop spiritual maturity as Christians is daily Scripture reading. Hearing the Bible read in church is like sitting in the passenger seat of a car. It does not teach us how to drive a car or learn the roads to our destination.

The CBS encourages each bishop to invite the clergy and laity of their diocese to join the bishop in reading the entire Bible in a year with the ultimate goal of helping thousands of individuals to develop a life-long spiritual practice of daily Bible reading.

Studies reveal that if a person reads the Bible for 21 days in a row they have an 80% chance of developing a lifetime discipline of daily Bible reading and that reading Scripture four times or more a week has a positive measurable impact on moral behavior.

Our website thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org offers many resources to help the members of your diocese and you.

In order to assist bishops, we recommend the following practices:

Timing

Your diocese and you can start The Bible Challenge at any time of the year. We have found that some ideal times include:

Start on January 1, when many people make New Year’s Resolutions. Encourage your clergy and laity to join you in making a spiritual resolution as you read the entire Bible together during the calendar year.

Start in Lent and use The Bible Challenge as a Lenten discipline that continues throughout the year.

Start at the beginning of the summer when many people experience a slower pace of life and have more time to read.

Start in the fall and go from September to August.

Start in Advent to read the Scriptures during the Church Year.

Translation, Reading Pace and Technology

We recommend reading the *New Oxford Annotated* edition of the Bible.

We encourage you to invite your clergy and laity to: 1) read three chapters of the Old Testament, 2) one psalm and 3) one chapter of the New Testament each day. This will get you through the Bible in a year.

We recommend encouraging clergy and lay members of your diocese to consider downloading the Bible on their iPad, iPhone, Kindle, Nook or other electronic device, or listening to it on CDs. The NIV Bible is readily available on CDs.

Reaching Out and Communicating the Transforming Experience

We encourage bishops to reach out to friends and acquaintances in their diocese and beyond to join them in reading the Bible in a year, including seminarians from your diocese and all those seeking ordination.

You are your diocese's number one evangelist. We encourage you to lead by example and encourage your clergy to do the same in their parishes.

Share testimonials in your diocesan newsletter, parish visits and diocesan convention about how The Bible Challenge is transforming you and others.

Recommended Strategies for Reading

Give permission to those participating in The Bible Challenge to skip or skim over genealogies and dietary codes, so they do not become mired down but complete their goal of reading the entire Bible.

We advocate using a devotional approach as opposed to a purely intellectual or academic reading of the Bible. Each reader should put him or herself in God's presence before reading.

How to Promote The Bible Challenge and Enjoy Free Publicity

We recommend that bishops write their clergy and also place an article in their newsletters inviting the diocese to join you in reading the entire Bible in a year.

Ask each rector to promote your invitation to join you in The Bible Challenge in their parish newsletter and Sunday announcements.

We encourage letting the media know that you and your diocese are participating in The Bible Challenge.

Reaching All Ages

We recommend parents read *The Big Picture Story Bible* by Scripture Union with children ages 2-7, *The Spark Bible* by NRSV or the *DK Bible* for older children.

For more information visit the CBS website for "Resources for Children, Youth and Families." We encourage diocesan teenagers with a mature faith to join The Bible Challenge using the *NIV Teen Study Bible*.

Providing Ongoing Support and Creating Accountability

It is vital to offer ongoing support, to hold people accountable and to assist them, especially during the first three months of The Bible Challenge. Those who meet with success in the first 90 days are likely to read the entire Bible.

We recommend printing in your diocesan newsletter the names of everyone in your diocese who participates in The Bible Challenge. This lets others know who and how many are participating. It also celebrates their spiritual commitment and holds them accountable to their commitment.

We suggest collecting the names and e-mail addresses of those participating in The Bible Challenge so that you as their bishop can use Constant Contact or other means to send out regular messages of support and wisdom to participants.

E-mail will allow you to offer special insights about the Bible. By sharing how reading the Bible strengthens your faith, you can inspire others.

Encourage participating churches to pray each Sunday for the spiritual transformation of those participating in The Bible Challenge.

Celebrating Your Diocesan Achievement

At year end, bishops are encouraged to hold a celebratory banquet for those who have participated in The Bible Challenge. Clergy and laity can offer brief testimonials about how reading the Bible has transformed their lives.

Award a certificate to everyone who has been a faithful Bible reader for a year and a special award to those who have read the entire Bible.

Re-launching The Bible Challenge in Your Diocese and Providing Options

Encourage participating churches to offer follow up classes for those who read the entire Bible and those who have struggled and did not finish.

Invite those who read the entire Bible to become parish mentors for those who participate in Year Two.

Re-launch The Bible Challenge each year in order to get more members of the diocese to read the entire Bible. In Year Two provide more options to participants (see the Bible Challenge for Bishops brochure).

Invite those who have read the Bible with you in one translation to re-read it with you in Year Two using a different translation. Re-launching The Bible Challenge affirms that the goal is to become a life-long daily reader of the Bible.

Long after you have retired, the most important thing that you will have done for the members of your diocese is to have shared God's Word, implanted it deep within their hearts and inspired them to read the Bible each day for the rest of their lives.

With gratitude for your leadership,

Marek

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Our advisory board includes:

The Most Rev. Rowan Williams
The Rev. Kenneth Kearon
The Rt. Rev. James Tengatenga
The Rt. Rev. Musonda Mwamba
The Rt. Rev. David Moxon
The Rt. Rev. Peter Carnley
The Rt. Rev. Philip Poole
The Rt. Rev. Frank Griswold
The Rt. Rev. Mark Sisk
The Rt. Rev. Wayne Wright
The Rt. Rev. Peter James Lee
The Rt. Rev. John Chane
The Rt. Rev. Andy Doyle
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The Very Rev. Dr. Ian Markham
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Dr. Marcus Borg
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The Rev. Scott Gunn
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Brian McLaren
Phyllis Tickle
The Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Very Rev. Spenser Simile
The Rev. Carol Anderson

“The Bible Challenge is an imaginative, simple and very Anglican way to ‘read, mark, learn and inwardly digest’ the rich legacy of Holy Scripture.

As we celebrate this year the 400th anniversary of the King James Version, that hugely influential Anglican gift to the English-speaking world, I commend The Bible Challenge as a faithful way to increase Biblical literacy among our people.”

Bishop Peter James Lee, former Bishop of Virginia

“The Center for Biblical Studies offers hope and tools for our Church. Reading the Scripture is a fundamental part of the Episcopal rule of life and has shaped our nation’s life at critical moments and inspired our Church’s missionary efforts. As our Church seeks to reach out in mission it is always important to first be ourselves evangelized. Programs for reading the Bible through CBS help us to not only read Scripture in community but also to prepare the community for mission. We all have our canon within a canon, our favorite pieces of Scripture. For instance most of us can recite John 3:16. But do we know 3:17? ‘Indeed, God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it.’ Reading the whole text is an Anglican principle that ensures that we are as individuals always setting our lives before the text and seeking our own personal transformation through the Word before guiding others in discovering their own life within the story of God’s redeeming love.”

Bishop Andy Doyle, Bishop of Texas

“The Bible Challenge is just what mainline churches across the United States need to reclaim the Bible in a healthy and spiritually productive way. It allows those who visit, worship and belong to our churches to discover spiritual joy and from daily Bible reading and a deep understanding of God’s Word. We plan on encouraging all of our churches, clergy and lay leaders in the Diocese of Arizona to participate in The Bible Challenge so that they can successfully read the Bible and develop a life-long spiritual practice of daily Bible reading. I commend The Bible Challenge to your diocese, church and you.”

Bishop Kirk Smith, Bishop of the Diocese of Arizona

“This project in Bible reading is enormously important for the church, its faith, and its missional vitality. In a time of cultural confusion and anxiety, the focus on and recovery of the biblical tradition is an important enterprise. I celebrate the way in which folk are ready, willing and able to engage with these old texts that run beyond all of our categories of expectation. I anticipate that much gain for the faithfulness of the Church will come from our common reading.”

Dr. Walter Brueggemann, Professor Emeritus of the Columbia Theological Seminary

“Like any conversation worth having, it takes time and personal discipline to listen--really listen--to what God might be saying to us through Holy Scripture. The Bible Challenge helps make possible that conversation, and the spiritual growth that will result from it.”

The Rev. C. K. Robertson, Ph.D., Canon to the Presiding Bishop of The Episcopal Church

“Nothing is more important to the Christian than the careful and close reading of Scripture. The Center for Biblical Studies and the Bible Challenge wants to change the Church; instead of a church which neglects Scripture, the Center wants a Church that loves and feeds on Scripture. This is an important cause. Let us bring back Biblical literacy and with it faithfulness.”

The Very Rev. Ian Markham, Dean of the Virginia Theological Seminary

“As a bishop, I am quite concerned about the biblical illiteracy which exists in our church. I worry that the Episcopal Church tends to “cede over” the Bible and careful study of it, leaving it to interpretations and theologies that do not reflect our tradition or understanding. The Bible Challenge is, to me, a very welcome development, positive and focused. It recognizes a real problem and provides a real plan and assistance in addressing it. In addition, I very much appreciate the desire to make the reading and study of

the Bible a ‘life-long spiritual practice.’ I am going to encourage our diocese to participate and I thank those who have brought this to life!”

Bishop Greg Rickel, Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia

“The Bible Challenge is a long needed and long desired way for our parishes and parishioners to engage in Bible reading. Reading the Bible has been a daunting prospect for many and The Center for Biblical Studies is providing a way for that to change . It can’t help but do what Bible study has always done-revitalize the life of the individual Christian and the mission of the Church. It is a welcome work of the Spirit.”

The Rev. Carol Anderson, former Rector of All Saints Church,
Beverly Hills

