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PRAYER AND SPECIAL CAMPAIGNS IN PAROCHIAL LIFE.

BY THE REV. H. A. EYTON-JONES, M.A., Vicar of St. John's,
Walthamstow.

IN obedience to the Editor's request I am writing an article on an aspect of Parochial Life. I feel that many others could have done it far better than myself, but the call has come and I must obey.

One of the greatest difficulties with which one is faced in parochial work to-day in large and growing parishes is that of relating the actual to the ideal. The tendency to substitute quantity for quality, or volume for value is everywhere apparent. It is the impact of the idea of mass production. It is reflected in the forms to be filled, it is found in the common estimate that a parish or a parson with numerous activities is achieving greatly. It is part of the make-up of a busy world. It is certainly a protest against inertia, a proof of zeal, a demonstration that the Church is not lost in thought while the legions of modern men and women thunder by and are lost. It asserts the admiration of machinery, the appreciation of departmental organization, the adoration of method. The danger is to secure machinery without driving power, organization without achievement and method without results.

Compare the cut of a modern aeroplane to that of the earlier efforts ; the modern aeroplane is clearer cut, excrescences are shorn off, the aim of rapid movement is remembered. This contains a lesson to be remembered in parish work. But it is not only in the existence of cumbrous and unwieldy machinery, it is in the lack of driving power that modern Churchmanship is so painfully conspicuous. The *Great Eastern*, that first attempt at the mammoth liner, was useless, so was broken up because she lacked in engine power. Her engines were unequal to her bulk. The Church to-day in the parish attempts a great deal, and makes but little headway through the stormy and tempest-tost waters. Is it that her engine power is lacking ?

The sources of material power are deep hidden or unseen. Coal and oil come from the depths, winds and electricity are unseen, and gravitation, the power that makes effective water power, is an unseen force.

The trouble is with ourselves and our arrangement of time, and our lack of practical faith in what we believe. In Acts vi. we read that the apostles would not minister to tables, for they must give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. So they appointed the deacons, and the significant result of their faith in spiritual methods is recorded in the increase of the Church.

When I went to my present parish we were faced with an ugly situation. There was, it is true, a beautiful new church, but a

debt of £5,000 lay on it. The people were poor, though the population of 20,000 was large, and set in a district of many open fields was bound to increase. The parish, too, had done its best and was weary ; the diocese had done its best and had other claims ; charitable donors all over the country had done their part and felt that they had given their share. But the debt remained, and within about two months of my institution £1,000 had to be found to pay the builder's bill. It was plain something special must be done. So we prayed.

We organized a whole day of Prayer, commencing with Holy Communion at 7 a.m., other services being held at 11 a.m., 3 p.m., and 8 p.m. Closing prayers were held at 10 p.m. The rest of the day was broken up into sections of a quarter of an hour each, and people signed a rota in the porch and came to pray in silence for a quarter of an hour ; thus every section was taken up. We prayed really, continuously, intensely throughout the day. It was a real day with God. I put papers in the Church with a suggested outline of Prayer. We did not only pray for money ; and suitable addresses were given at the services.

This is our outline Scheme of Prayer :—

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRAYER.

" Ask and it shall be given you."

1. *For the Parish.* For a great vision of God and great power of the Holy Spirit to come upon the Vicar and Staff, Church Council, Choir, Sunday School teachers, leaders, our congregation. That the whole parish may be moved and that men, women and children may see God's Glory, and the Duplex Scheme be a great success. That the sick may be healed if it is God's will, and that all sufferers may be comforted and led to know God's will and rejoice in it. For all needed workers. That we may be taught of God to pray. That our debt may be speedily cleared away. The money needed for the completion of the church supplied ; that the money needed for the verger's cottage may be obtained, and all our financial needs may be met. That all our needs spiritual and material may be met by God. *Thank God* for His help in the past and present ; for our beautiful church and our Spiritual privileges.

2. *For the Diocese.* That the bishops and all the leaders of every parish may receive a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and be led into the fullness of the blessing of Christ, and into a complete knowledge of God and His Truth. That all needed courage, wisdom, and means be supplied for the extension of God's Kingdom. That all needed clergy and workers be supplied. *Thank God* for what the diocese has done for us, and for God's work throughout the country.

3. *For the Locality.* For God's blessing on our town, civil leaders, spiritual teachers, charitable enterprises, building schemes, relief—that all may be done on Christian principles. *Thank God* for good people and good things.

4. *For our Nation.* National Church, Church Assembly (Church reform and Prayer-book revision), King and Parliament, improvement of national ideals, better observance of God's day. C.P.A.S., etc. *Thank God* for our national heritage, church and state.

5. *For the World.* Christian world work, especially C.M.S., Colonial and Continental, home and abroad. India, China, Japan, Africa, British Empire and Colonists, that the Gospel may come. *Thank God* for the wonderful growth of Missionary work during the last century, for the devotion of missionaries.

6. *For Ourselves.* That our needs, and those of our loved ones, may

be supplied—our own lives full of love to God and others. That we may each one rise by Faith and Prayer, and Bible Study and service, to our high calling in Christ. That any sin which spoils our lives may be removed, and any evil habit overcome. That we may rise to our highest possibilities in Christ, and that Christ may be able to enter and dwell in our lives with all His power. *Thank God for personal blessings of all kinds.*

You will see our prayers cover a wide range and are not merely selfish. And God answered. The builder's bill was delayed through no action of ours by a fortnight, and when it came the money was there to pay it. By the time I had been in the parish twelve months over £3,000 had been raised.

We had many other whole days of prayer. Just before my second anniversary I felt that we must pray for the whole debt to be cleared by that date if it were God's will. We united in prayer for this object, and as I sat in the vestry on a Saturday two days before the anniversary the balance of the money came in. We did indeed thank God on that day. God had wonderfully answered our prayers. It had appeared a rash action to some, and inviting unbelief, but faith comes from trusting God and putting Him to the test in the matter of His Promises.

We have other methods of Prayer. Special prayer in the Sunday services, prayer meetings for extemporary prayer which I believe are a wonderful way of stirring up young Christians to pray, and I know that our people prayed privately. This scheme can be used, praying each week day for one section, as a private prayer plan.

If you look at the list of subjects for Prayer you will notice that we pray for the locality, i.e. our town, and our nation. The time came when we found ourselves face to face with a great difficulty, which was God's opportunity to answer this prayer and to make us pray more earnestly that in the answer we might save our town and nation.

In the autumn of 1927 I heard that land was being acquired for a Greyhound Track within my parish, and a company was being floated to build and manage the track. I reasoned with the owner of the land, but he refused to stop the sale, saying it was too late. I then went with a prominent local layman and we together reasoned with the owner, but he proved adamant. We then decided that we should take action. I consulted the rural dean, and with his consent convened a meeting of local clergy in my parish hall. I got in touch with the Nonconformists and got their leaders to send an invitation to their ministers and leading laymen to come. I invited several town councillors known to myself, and we got several headmasters of schools and representatives of local football and cricket interests. The result of our conference was that we passed a resolution against the proposed track, we formed a committee to see what could be done, and we called on the Town Council to call a Town's Meeting of Protest. My layman friend acted as Chairman of the Committee and I acted as Secretary. Our Committee grew and represented one great interest in the

town after another—the allotment holders, the property owners, the Chamber of Commerce, Toc H, the Salvation Army, etc., etc. The interest of the local paper was secured and they gave us splendid support, while letters and articles were written to point out the dangers of such a track.

Letters were sent round to every place of worship and each congregation was asked to express its opposition and to offer prayer against the evil. In my own Church I preached a special sermon and asked the congregation to stand in silent protest—which they did with only one exception.

We also sought advice and co-operated with the National Emergency Committee which had been formed.

We had a day of Prayer at our Church and every meeting of the local committee was opened and closed with prayer.

At first the Urban District Council were not very favourable and told us that it was not their business to call a Town's Meeting of Protest, but as we were well-known citizens we could have the use of the Town Hall free to call our own Protest Meeting. But gradually the tide turned, and when we informed the Council how the track could be prevented by the plans being turned down, under the Town Planning Act, the whole Urban District Council, with only one dissentient, turned down the plans. The Town Hall was packed for the Public Meeting of Protest and there was an overflow of 800 in another building. Powerful speeches were delivered by local people, the chair being taken by the Chairman of the Urban District Council, and Mr. Joe Compton spoke. He is the M.P. for Gorton, the district where the Bellevue Greyhound Racing Track, the oldest greyhound racing track in England, was situated. Both meetings passed unanimous votes against the greyhound racing track and later a petition with over 14,000 signatures was obtained. Prayer, co-operation and education had killed the greyhound racing track, and though there were men of title and wealth on the Walthamstow Greyhound Racing Company, we had won.

From our Church, too, was inaugurated an educational campaign which stirred the town and persuaded both our Members of Parliament to vote against the New Prayer Book. Here again we had a whole day of Prayer, besides other opportunities for Prayer. And here we see another striking answer of one item on the Prayer Scheme.

Since then, in autumn, 1928, a campaign against Sunday games in our parks and public spaces has been victorious. I was asked to put the case before the Ruridecanal Conference, which opposed the extension of Sunday facilities by 74 votes to 7, and Nonconformists also acted and the Urban District Council turned down the proposal.

We have also moved to secure for playing fields a great stretch of ground. Besides these campaigns we have had a number of special parochial efforts. Two missions have been held, which have been richly blessed of God in uplifting Christians and bringing

souls definitely into the Kingdom. A wonderful missionary exhibition, under the auspices of the C.M.S., has just been held, at which 1,200 to 1,400 were present. We had over seventy stewards and real enthusiasm has been generated. Again, on the verge of these efforts we had a whole day of Prayer.

One of our school teachers in the Sunday School, who had been a boy in our Sunday School, heard the call to the Ministry and is now training in Canada, and is doing very well indeed.

A number of our young people have been definitely converted to God and they help us by speaking in the open air, teaching in the Sunday School, and other forms of witness.

We are now working and praying for the building of a new Sunday School, as our present schools are full to overflowing, and a great new area of our parish has been built on, while other building is proposed. A site has been promised as a gift, and over £1,000 given and promised for the school and church hall already, but a large balance is still needed and time presses. A parish one mile broad by a mile and a half long is no easy problem to tackle when it has a large and growing population. I have only one curate and two lady workers, and apart from the Church Pastoral-Aid Society I would be without help.

We have terrible poverty among our people and problems of drink and vice, but there are many bright spots. One poor woman whose husband was all wrong got matters put right by prayer and came and told me. Many other wonderful private answers have been given.

I feel very unfit to write about Prayer, because we have not done many things we should have done, but we feel in Prayer we have touched a secret spring of divine fruitfulness that has watered our dry land, and we pray God that by His Grace we may enter into the whole of our inheritance. God grant that in our parish and throughout our land and the world there may be a mighty revival of true religion.

It is surely by bringing prayer into our organizations, by relating the actual to the ideal in the sense of bringing our needs into touch with God that our work can be done. Christianity is Christ, and it is not by the wisdom of men but by the power of God that our Church shall do great things. We have had many signal answers to our prayers, but I believe that God has stirred us up that we may have many more.