

Aloha Kakahiaka.

As I begin my Convention Address today, I invite you to join me in saying the prayer that St Francis of Assisi offered to God before the Crucifix at the chapel of San Damiano in about 1205.

Let us pray together:

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me
true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out
Your holy and true command. Amen.

This is one of two prayers that I say every day. You might remember that Francis prayed these words after he heard the voice of God to “Go and build my Church.” He took it to literally mean rebuilding the ruined chapel, but soon understood the command as something much more.

For Francis and for us – for you and me, God’s People – the commandment of God to be lived is the Great Commandment found in Mark 12:29-31 when Jesus said: “The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

As you well know, the Church is NOT our buildings. We – you and I, God’s People – are the Church. Likewise, the Diocese is not the Bishop and the very few people that work on the second floor of the Memorial Building at the Cathedral, but we – you and I, God’s People – are the Diocese of Hawai‘i.

Let me acknowledge up front that we live in interesting times. We are here in person. We are together! Yes, there are masks and we’ve had to have vaccinations and booster shots, but we are together. The Pandemic has abated – or at least we’re getting used to it. We are learning to live with the COVID-19 virus – as we must live with the flu – as a new regular part of life. We’ve changed. The Pandemic has impacted our lives in ways we’re just beginning to understand.

There is more: the war in Europe and Korean missile launches over Japan; a Stock Market crash and inflation; hurricanes and wildfires directly related to climate

change; nationalism and violence. Racism, sexism, and homophobia seem to again be publicly proclaimed in some corners of the world and our society. Somehow the 2020's feel like the 1920's and '30's.

Yet, as I shared in my written Convention Report for the past year, we have come back together. We are worshipping in person. Fellowship is returning. We are serving our communities, we are caring for the houseless and the hungry. We are being God's Church. Mahalo!

I am most happy to be making visitations again. The core of my ministry and my greatest joy is being with you – God's people. The Church only exists in relationship: our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our relationship with one another, and our relationship with the community around us and the world. We are an incarnational people.

As I listen to the very preliminary reports from the Diocesan Council's Listening Team and from what I hear from you – God's people – I know that nurturing relationships is a primary ministry of the Diocese and for me as Bishop over the next few years. As Disciples of Christ Jesus, I think our diocesan ministry of reconciliation will be about renewing our relationships with our neighborhoods and islands, with people around us, and with the created order.

So, I want you to keep two words in mind as you pray and serve God: **RELATIONSHIPS AND RECONCILIATION**. Through the years, repeated surveys and conversations leading to strategic plans and visions have clearly stated that you – God's people – no we – every clergy person and every congregation – need to work, party and pray together. We adopted a vision in 2017 that stated that we would:

1. Seek to strengthen our identity as one 'ohana and the relationships within our 'ohana among clergy, lay leaders and congregations.
2. Focus on improving the capacity for communication within our congregations, across the Diocese, and into our communities as we engage in evangelism.

We have made small strides in this through the years. The Pandemic slowed us down a bit, but we still kept trying. A Cup of Cold Water on Maui is an example. Congregations sometimes gather for fellowship. There are occasional joint

worship events. Let's be honest, it has not been enough. We have to work together by island and by region.

We know how to do this! We have had examples. The historic way of being one mission of the Episcopal Church on West Kaua'i with two sites is decades old. St. James Church on Hawai'i has incorporated St. Columba's, Pa'auilo, into one parish 'ohana. We also had a major failure on west O'ahu. We learned good lessons. Further, sharing and cooperation have happened before.

What does it take? I think three things:

1. Work together: This can be an outreach project. It also might mean going to help your neighboring congregation on a work day and then having them come help you.
2. Eat and party together: Yes, we are incarnational people. We bond over food.
3. Worship and learn together: As Disciples of Christ Jesus, we are nurtured and shaped by the Scripture, spiritual practices, and the worship of God. They define us.

Why do I think this is important at this point in our life together as God's People in the Diocese of Hawai'i?

We need one another! We need all voices and everyone's engagement to meet the challenges of life in our new environment.

We must be clear on the role of clergy. Priests are called to preach and administer the Sacraments. God's people expect their priests to be spiritual leaders. Deacons are called to make the needs of the world known to God's people. God's people should expect deacons to be holy pains in the neck (or somewhere else) making the needs of the world known and calling God's People to respond. The ordained are not called to negotiate contracts or be property managers. They are not called to fill out financial reports.

How does the other practical "business" of the Church get done? Well, I think that is up to you, God's People. We likely will need one another.

More importantly, we need one another to see and respond to the world around us. We need one another to reach our neighbors with the love of God in Jesus Christ. We know there is no such thing as a lone Christian. We each individually must be in the fellowship of Disciples – part of God’s People. Likewise in the Episcopal Church, there is no lone congregation. We need to be in the fellowship of the Diocese. We are together the Body of Christ – the Diocese of Hawai‘i – God’s People.

Let’s be clear. The old Church of the 20th century is gone. I’d even suggest that the pre-Pandemic Church is gone. We are called to be the Church in a new time. Our faith is in Christ Jesus and not in a certain way of being Church.

As we live in this new time, we must be clear on what is needed. Hearing from you – God’s People – I am often asked about the following and we must respond:

- (1) Discipleship: I hear from folk that they want to learn how to pray. They want to understand the Bible. They want to know what the Episcopal Church believes and why. Here I must highlight that this takes commitment on the part of you – God’s people – and that those providing such teaching – usually the clergy – need time to prepare and pray. This is needed to live faithfully each day.
- (2) Evangelism: Here, the presenting issue is that “my” congregation is getting smaller or getting older. Please be clear, evangelism is NOT about getting new members for your congregation. We are inviting others into a relationship with God. We are inviting our friends and family into a joyful community loved by Jesus Christ. We must be eager to share that love. This will happen in person and in many places – but it need not be all – online. It will happen in traditional buildings and completely outside the sanctuary. It will be more about all the baptized than about the ordained. It must be about us – each one of us – being able to tell our own stories of faith. Why are you a Disciple of Jesus Christ? Why does your faith make a difference in your life?
- (3) Reconciliation: As we learn to tell our stories, we – God’s people, for God’s world – must come to grips with our own failure and our own pain. When have we – the Church – consciously or unconsciously excluded others. When have we expected others to become good Episcopalians, rather than asking what is essential to our identity as followers of Christ and how can

we adapt to be inclusive and welcoming? Racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism are part of our history and our current reality. As we hear from one another and are honest with ourselves, we can be effective agents of reconciliation in God's world. Reconciliation begins with repentance and renewal both personally and as God's people. I believe that it is through our ministry of reconciliation that we as Christians can address the reality of violence and economic injustice in God's world. As Disciples, we are God's agents of reconciliation. As Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 5:17-19: "So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!" All of these new things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and who gave us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them. He has trusted us with this message of reconciliation."

(4) Climate Care and Environmental Justice: The single biggest threat to the world at this moment is the harm we human beings have done to the planet. This can be overwhelming. We must do what we can as individuals and as the Church. It will mean changing. We can partner with others to both care for our islands and to advocate on behalf of God's creation.

I think you can see why I think our life together requires RELATIONSHIPS AND RECONCILIATION.

The way ahead is not clear. We will have to be adaptable and open to change. I think the past three years have taught us something about that.

With the local formation through the Waiolaihui‘ia Center for Ministry, we have learned that clergy – priests and deacons – and now lay preachers and catechists can be trained locally. Now, we must develop and accept new models of mission and ministry in our islands and congregations.

As Paul said, "So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!"

The changes and challenges, the new opportunities and joys, will be made all the easier – and more delightful – if we move forward together as a diocesan ‘ohana – and not as separate congregations or individual Episcopalians.

This is a time of discernment, new opportunities, experimentation and re-imagining what it means to be God's People for God's World in the Diocese of Hawai'i. We can be assured that our Diocese will look very different in even two or three years from now than it does now. You and I must be together in seeking God's will. We must be about RELATIONSHIP AND RECONCILIATION.

You might remember that at the height of the Pandemic, I offered an online study of the First Letter of Peter. It was then the basis of the Bible study at the recent Lambeth Conference. I have come to profoundly appreciate a verse from the letter. I truly think that it defines why we're together:

“Once you weren’t a people, but now you are God’s people. Once you hadn’t received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” *1 Peter 2:10*

We are a people. We are God's People. We are one 'ohana. We are the Diocese of Hawai'i.

As I conclude, I want us to pray the other prayer that I say every day. The prayer of Saint Richard (1253) of Chichester reminds us that our walk with Christ is renewed everyday. We will together find the path God intends of us – God's People.

Let us pray.

Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits thou hast given me,
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know thee more clearly,
love thee more dearly,
and follow thee more nearly, day by day.
Amen.

Mahalo.