

Bishop's Convention Address

I am recording my Convention Address this year on Saturday, October 9th. I'm doing so to allow time for it to be prepared for the Annual Meeting and give Convention's Response to the Bishop's Address time to see it before the Annual Meeting.

As I consider the next year of the life of our Diocesan 'Ohana, I do so reflecting on our Diocesan goals and priorities, and St. Francis's "Canticle of the Creatures."

Regarding the Canticle, we are told that: "Chronologically, there are three stages to consider in the development of this poetic praise of God, each of which reveals a side of Francis's vision of God, creation, and the human soul. Francis's companions tell us of the composition of the first part of this piece, verses 1-9, in which the saint sings the praises of creation in glorifying God. While suffering intensely from his physical infirmities, he announced: 'I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord's creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator.' A short while later, after hearing of a quarrel that had broken out between the civil and religious authorities of Assisi, Francis asked the brothers to go before them singing these verses, but added two more, verses 10-11. He composed the final verses 12-13 on his death bed" in 1226.¹

Listen to these amazing words:

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.



Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

Please hold this Canticle in your minds as we consider the future of the Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i.

God willing, we are now coming out of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The past two years forced us to find new ways of being Church. There is no going back. Our churches and our Islands will never be the same.

We have said that as a Diocese "Our Vision" is to be "a gathering of God's people [or the Presiding Bishop says, "the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement"] in these Islands – being spiritually nourished and engaged."

We have said we would do this by developing and supporting the lay and clergy leaders so they can transform their churches and their local communities.

We also have five key goals (three from our own strategic work, and two from the Presiding Bishop and the Episcopal Church):

1. *Commit to developing and sustaining spiritual growth, vitality, curiosity, and well-being within our churches.*²
2. *Seek to strengthen our identity as one 'ohana and the relationships within our 'ohana among clergy, lay leaders and congregations.*³
3. *Focus on improving the capacity for communication within our congregations, across the Diocese, and into our communities as we engage in evangelism*⁴
4. *Build God's beloved community.*⁵



5. *Encourage and support care of God's creation and environmental justice.*⁶

These goals, like the Canticle of Francis, highlight our interconnectedness. I hope that the Pandemic has taught us that we cannot be isolated individuals or congregations. We must depend on one another. We must set the Great Commandment at the center of our lives as the followers of Christ Jesus (Mark 12:29-31): "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."

1. Our first goal is about being prepared to live into that Commandment: Commit to developing and sustaining spiritual growth, vitality, curiosity, and well-being within our churches.

In my written Convention Report, I highlighted the dramatic increase in congregationally based online Bible studies, confirmation classes, weekday worship opportunities, and other formation programs.

This goal has a focus of supporting congregations as the centers of spiritual growth and formation. For you, God's people, is that true? Have you taken on prayer practices from teaching in your congregation? Have you been shaped by Holy Scripture in Bible study? Have you shared with others in your congregation how you became a disciple of Jesus Christ? Does life at home reflect your faith?

A key to this goal is for each gathered community of Episcopalians to be clear on the spirituality of your church and how faith in Jesus is articulated.

As we come out of the Pandemic, I know some are worried that many folk will not come back to regular worship. I get that. We know that over 85% of people join a congregation because of a personal invitation: a friend invites a friend. Even with through the internet and online worship, that has been the case – friends encouraged friend (often around the world) to join online. There is no miraculous program or special ad campaign. It doesn't really matter if the Presiding Bishop preached at a royal wedding. What matters is your congregation and whether you believe that it is a community where lives are transformed and God's love experienced. If it is, you will want your family members and friends to join in the journey of God. Others will want to with you.

This goal – spiritual vitality -- is about you – each and every individual member of the Episcopal Diocese of Hawai'i and your congregation. Do you experience God in your congregation? Can you sing with Francis: "Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing"?

As a Diocese, we can provide trainings – and being online more can attend. I can and will continue to offer Bible studies. I have even been asked to offer an online confirmation class.

The Episcopal Church has many resources. I particularly call your attention "My Way of Love for Small Groups" (see <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/my-way-of-love/>).



Most importantly, I want us to take up the Presiding Bishop's challenge to become "a new and re-formed church, the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement— individuals, small gathered communities and congregations whose way of life is the way of Jesus and his way of love" (see <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/church-that-looks-and-acts-like-jesus/>).

He is calling the Episcopal Church to re-formation.

What does the Presiding Bishop think this *re*-formation will look like in practice?

We'll know we're moving forward when we...

1. **Center on Jesus Christ.** His teachings, his example, his Spirit, his way of love and his way of life are the key to having loving, liberating and life-giving relationships with God, our neighbors, all of creation, and ourselves.
2. **Practice the selfless, self-giving way of the cross.** The way of "cruciform love"—Jesus' act of unselfish, sacrificial, self-offering love, or losing one's life in order to gain it— is our way to authentic life.
3. **Unite around the practice of a rule of life in small, gathered communities.** These kinds of groups—small circles of people who support each other in following Jesus with intention and accountability— are necessary for cultivating Christ-centered life.
4. **Reclaim our Christian identity as a Spirit-driven, countercultural, underground movement.** We must break free of the church's identification with domination systems, empire, establishment, privilege, and social and cultural traditions that have held us captive— and get back in touch with the risk-taking, liberating ways of Jesus.
5. **Live and bear bold witness to the vision and values of Jesus.** We point to the reality of the kingdom (the peaceable reign) of God, and we seek to embody the beloved community, where each person strives for and celebrates the dignity and flourishing of every beloved child of God as much as we do for ourselves.

While this is a particular area of responsibility for the Commission on Ministry, Waiolaihui'ia, Canon Sandy and me, we will need to learn and grow together – all of God's people, lay and clergy. You know my love of Franciscan spirituality. The Presiding Bishop offers a profoundly Franciscan vision of God's Church.

It is a way, as the Canticle concludes, that we can "Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility."

2. Our second goal is about how we live together as a Diocese: Seek to strengthen our identity as one 'ohana and the relationships within our 'ohana among clergy, lay leaders and congregations.

You might ask here: But Bishop didn't you just urge us to understand ourselves with our congregations and to take up the Presiding Bishop's challenge? Yes, we have set our



congregational and personal ministries within the context of the larger life of the Episcopal Church, and our interconnectedness as Episcopalians in these Islands. It is not either or, but all of the above.

The call to strengthen relationships has been answered during the Pandemic with many regular online gatherings and trainings provided for clergy, wardens, administrators, communicators, and the like by the Diocesan Support Center staff. Before the pandemic, the 'Ohana Design Team worked on joint activities between congregations – especially on Kauai.

What is this goal really about? In my years in the Diocese, this call to work together has most often been articulated by lay people. I have heard several reasons: 1. I really want to get to know my fellow Episcopalians. 2. We're getting older and really need to work together. 3. The time is coming when we might need to share more. 4. We used to do more together (special liturgical events, fellowship activities, youth groups, education programs, Eucharistic Minister trainings, etc.) and I miss that.

Generally, I find clergy more resistant because these activities can bring them more work. I understand that. Such joint activities are also far more common on neighbor islands, than on O'ahu. Interestingly, I sometime sense the closer the churches are physically to one another, the harder it is to have shared communication and activities. This is true on a diocesan wide level as well: Neighbor Island congregations, on the whole, often provide more leaders to the Diocese (and therefore those from the Neighbor Islands are the decision makers on Diocesan Council and Standing Committee) and are generally better informed about the Diocese than those in churches on O'ahu. It has been suggested to me that this a classic urban/rural issue. I am reminded that the idea for an island wide confirmation first came from the Big Island congregations and focused on a big event at the chapel on the campus of HPA. We all must be that connected.

As we come out of the Pandemic, we – the lay and ordained leaders – will have to acknowledge the grief of many and the desire for everything to go back to “normal.” We can't let that happen. Our Church and our world have changed. We will need one another in this new reality. Isolation will ensure stagnation and the arrival of Sister Death. How much do we want to invest in sharing resources and ministry? Are we willing to change?

For example, St. Paul's congregation has been worshipping on the campus of the Cathedral since August 11, 1959. I think it is time to rewrite the canons of the Diocese and then the bylaws of the Cathedral so that members of that congregation have as much say in the use of the property, the maintenance of the buildings, and the spending of financial resources of the Cathedral as the members of St. Andrew's congregation. After over sixty years, it is time to manage things as one extended family on Queen Emma Square with different identities and customs but making all decisions together.

A special team of lay members of Diocesan Council is meeting with every Vestry and Bishop's Committee and the clergy in the congregations to get a sense of how things are



going and ascertain needed support. These are not evaluations, but truly a chance to discern possibilities for cooperation and support. What do the congregations need to survive?

I think that I will need the help of the Diocesan Council, Standing Committee and a renewed 'Ohana Task Force to take up what it means to strengthen our identity as one diocesan 'ohana and our relationships in a post-Pandemic Diocese of Hawai'i. Are we finally at a place to serve and celebrate with one another as Episcopalians in Hawai'i?

Again, this may be, as the Canticle concludes, that we can "Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility."

3. Our third diocesan goal is to focus on improving the capacity for communication within our congregations, across the Diocese, and into our communities as we engage in evangelism.

There certainly have been far more trainings about "communication" in the technical sense. We have a Communication Task Force and Diocesan Support Center staff have done great work providing opportunities for those trainings and for support. Many grants have been made in the past two years to improve our congregations' capacities for online worship and virtual meetings. We are present on social media platforms. We have folk joining online worship from around the world. There is a great deal of information shared by e-news (of the Diocese and within congregations) and on the web. Is it effective?

Frankly, I don't think this goal is really about all that. What is being asked for is as much about having the time and place to talk story. The "information" is available. If it is not accessed, it is meaningless. If gatherings – in-person or online – are not attended, where can folk talk?

Like the rest of the world in the 21st century, we are just beginning to address the meaning of "communication" – of true community and fellowship. I will certainly need the help of the Communications Task Force and all of you on this one.

Oh, by the way, please open and read the entire eChronicle and the emails from the Diocesan Support Center staff – especially mine – when they come your way.

We've also taken on two larger goals of the Episcopal Church.

4. Our fourth goal is to "Build God's Beloved Community."

The Reconciliation Task Force has begun the work of helping us as a Diocese to look at racial reconciliation and justice in our Diocese and these Islands. That began yesterday in our conversation on racism at Education Day.

It is a beginning.



At ordination, a bishop in the Episcopal Church promises to “encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries, nourish them from the riches of God's grace, pray for them without ceasing, and celebrate with them the sacraments of our redemption.”⁷

At one time, too often and for too long in our history, our interpretation of these promises and vision for the Church led to helping or cajoling all of God's people toward an ideal of being an upper-middle class, university educated, white, Western European (ideally English) American (that is a citizen of the United States). It was an imperialist enterprise for the Church within the broader American culture.

Now, this enterprise had positive results with the building of schools and hospitals. It provided the means for social mobility and literacy. It was also stifling and degrading. It devalued languages and cultures in a way inconsistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It therefore hurt and divided God's people.

The Episcopal Church can no longer minister and lead with such an imperialist mindset – even subconsciously. We are called upon to meet God's people where they are, to honor our cultural and linguistic differences, and to be culturally competent in a diverse community while holding onto our identity as followers of Christ Jesus in the Episcopal Church.

That does mean facing up to the prejudices and bias in our Episcopal Church, in our Diocese, in our congregations, in each one of us, and in me.

This must be something different than anti-racism training. This isn't about resolutions of conventions. This must be about true re-formation of the Episcopal Church, our Diocese, our congregations, and ourselves. It is about racial and economic justice where we live. This will require hard and honest conversations. We are being called to change and to see with the eyes of Christ. We are just beginning.

As Francis sang in his Canticle: “Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.”

5. Our fifth goal is to encourage and support care of God's creation and environmental justice.

The Creation Care and Environmental Justice Task Force has begun the work of helping us as a Diocese to look at environmental reconciliation and justice in our Diocese and these Islands. Hopefully you recently received and filled out the survey for this team. We have resolutions to come before this meeting of Convention.

Now, some might be thinking this is what we have doing in years past with free recycle bins, solar panel projects, low energy light bulbs, community gardens, and so forth. Those are part of it, but we must do far more as a world, nation, islands, churches and individuals. More must be done. Perhaps it means budgeting for carbon offsets or



planting trees ourselves. It certainly means being active in the local community and State caring for the environment, and advocating for civil and personal action.

This is about the existential crisis of our time and about the loss of these Islands. What can we do, where we are, right now to save our world from the harm we have done, and the harm we have done to the poorest and the powerless?

Much of the Canticle of the Creatures is about this connection to creation, but let us at least remember this verse: "Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs."

Next year will be an adventure – a pilgrimage in the Way of Love. Thank you for allowing me to go with you.

Let me conclude with some additional words of gratitude.

I give thanks to the Creator:

As every day, for Bea, and for the birth of a granddaughter this year, Lisann Marie. For you, God's People, and especially for the lay leaders and clergy who have served during this Pandemic.

For the entire Diocesan Support Center staff: Danny, Denise, Rae, Sandy, Sonny and Sybil, and especially for Peter as he concludes over thirty years with the Episcopal Church in Hawai'i.

As I noted in my written report, this past year has given me new hope for the future of the Episcopal Church in Hawai'i. We have been resilient, unafraid, and faithful to Jesus Christ. As this Pandemic – God willing – wains, we will take that courage and faith into a new world that still needs to hear the Word of God's Love. As Paul writes in his Letter to the Romans: "I'm convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created." (Romans 8:38-39).

So, before we go on with the business of the Convention, let us quietly pray again the Canticle of the Creatures:

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing.

To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.



And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

Amen.

Mahalo.

¹ *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol 1, The Saint* (New York: New City Press, 2001), p. 113. The translation of the Canticle of the Creatures is taken from this text beginning on the same page.

² See the eChronicle for information on the 2017 Strategic Plan
(<http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?m=1101479076646&ca=71a5a64e-8f6c-4824-b542-05831f5a0f10>).

³ See the eChronicle for information on the 2017 Strategic Plan
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⁵ A priority of The Episcopal Church (see “Becoming the Beloved Community” at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/beloved-community/>).

⁶ A priority of The Episcopal Church (see “Creation Care” at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/creation-care/>).

⁷ The Book of Common Prayer, 1979, page 518.

