



The Episcopal Diocese of Idaho

Phone: (208) 345 - 4440 | Fax: (208) 345 - 9735

Pastoral Letter to be read on Sunday, November 13th at all churches in the Diocese of Idaho.

Dear Brothers and Sisters

Yesterday we completed our 55th Diocesan Convention even though we had been in Idaho for over a hundred plus years. For two days, our clergy, lay leaders, and other guests from around the diocese gathered to celebrate our faith, prayed together with love, and envisioned a future for Episcopalians in Idaho with great hope. The Very Rev. Sean, Dean of St. Michael's Cathedral, The Very Rev Lea Colvill, rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Idaho Falls, and The Rev. Karen Hunter, Rector at Grace Church in Nampa, spoke beautifully on the theme of the convention "**Rebuild My church**," a vision for the Episcopal Church in Idaho.

But why the theme "Rebuild my Church?"

About 800 years ago, Jesus asked a wealthy young man named Francis to build his church rather to partner with God to rebuild the church that was in ruins. It was St. Francis of Assisi who, after returning from a war in Perugia, heard the voice that asked for help.

God asked the help of a tiny little human to rebuild His collapsing church in the middle ages. In his vision, Francis heard, "Go, rebuild my church which is falling down." Francis thought his call was to rebuild the physical plant and started building ruined churches nearby. One of those churches, named "Portiuncula", the little chapel of St Mary of the Angels, is still standing enclosed in a big basilica just outside of Assisi. Francis eventually realized his call was not necessary to rebuild the physical plant, it was to renew the faith of the middle ages through prayer, penance, poverty, and peace.

Now we are at the beginning of the third Millenium and at the fifth reformation era of faith life in the world, as Phyllis Tickle pointed out in her books and retreats.



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The Church is in need of renewal. We are called to rebuild our church anew in the modern world. Our call is to build a church that is authentic in word and deed, brick by brick, but even more soul by soul. We can not afford to be complacent anymore.

Our world is hungry for a church that preaches Jesus Christ without shame or embarrassment. Fundamentalism is on the rise because educated Christians like us fail to uplift Jesus Christ as the central focus of our faith but rather focus on everything else but Christ as if preaching Christ diminishes our acceptance of all people. Yes, I am fully aware that we all carry the baggage of past hurts, fundamentalist teachings of a judgmental God, and the inauthentic lifestyle of church leaders.

Moral and spiritual failures of past Christian leadership is no excuse for us to shy away from preaching Christ. Jesus or his theology is not at fault for how we messed up the interpretation of the Gospel. We can still pick up where he left off and build and rebuild.

Our focus on Jesus Christ is not for the sake of his name but for what he stood for, how he lived his life, and how he challenged those in power. We do not shy away from preaching Jesus as our model and our strength. We continue to preach Christ in the face of those who preach Him without preaching his unfathomable and welcoming love of all and care of nature. He often retreated into the hours of the night under the stars that could be seen in the clear sky.

Sometimes we believe we have to shy away from preaching Christ to appease people of other faiths. The basic principle of ecumenism is standing firm and clear in our faith with listening hearts and willingness to change when needed. There is no ecumenism and collaboration when we are confused or convinced of who Christ is to us personally.

We can not live our faith as if we do not believe in much of anything and hope to attract people to a confused theology. We can not live our faith as anything goes; nothing matters. We can not afford to preach the Gospel without reading the Gospel ourselves. We can not be a people of faith when we are stuck on beliefs and systems that have nothing to do with transformational faith. We can not be a church when praying together is out of fashion or not in our schedules. You and I can not take a vacation from being with God in living communities. Expecting our clergy to be present at the altar to



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keep it going while we are on a hike in the mountains and not among those who are walking the journey with us every day.

God is calling us to emerge from the rubbles of the past and renew the face of the earth in our context and in communities.

- I invite you to live your faith through daily prayer.
- Be faithful in worship and fellowship.
- Be good stewards of your time, talent, and treasure.
- Be generous to your local church to spread the word about Jesus Christ, who loved the world without limitations.
- Be a person who is not shy about telling the world that we, too, read the Bible like no other.

I invite you to reflect on what C.S. Lewis says, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

Yes, my dear brothers and sisters, see through the eyes of God in the light of God. Let Holy Spirit propel your spiritual life and not some philosophical interpretation of what God is. Let the mystical power that is beyond your control or understanding guide your steps.

When your faith becomes an outpouring of your unfathomable love of Jesus Christ, the church will renew itself without your doing anything else. If we ever thought the church would be renewed and grow without your life in Christ at the altar, at prayer, and at fellowship, we are completely disillusioned.

Therefore, let us renew our faith life, and we will rebuild our church!

Your brother in Christ

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Jos Tharakan", with a stylized flourish at the end. The signature is written over the printed name and title.

+Jos

The Rt. Rev. Jos Tharakan
XIV Bishop of Idaho