



the
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH *in*
WESTERN OREGON

October 28, 2023

Address to the 135th Annual Meeting of the Diocesan Convention

The Rt. Rev. Diana D. Akiyama, Bishop

“O God, you will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are fixed on you; for in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be our strength.” *Isaiah 26:3; 30:15*

This quote from Isaiah reminds us of the center point of our faith - a place where we draw strength and sustenance from the peace and quietness we know in God.

The second scripture passage worthy of our reflection today is from 2nd Corinthians: “It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus’ sake. For the same God who said, “Out of darkness let light shine,” has caused his light to shine within us, to give the light of revelation—the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

The apostle Paul reminds us of the focus of our work as followers of Jesus Christ. Although our work in our various ministries is magnified by our unique gifts and strengths, it is not about us and our glory, but instead about the glory of God. And all that we do to proclaim Christ is to allow his light to shine within us and therefore into the world.

These two scripture passages give shape and form to our common life as the Episcopal Church in Western Oregon in these times.

Isaiah reminds us of the strength we receive when we are centered in prayer and therefore able to trust in God. There is deep and profound peace in this kind of spiritual stability, especially in times when the world seems to be convulsing from rapid change.

Paul’s words to the church emphasize the work we are called to do because of our commitment to Christ. But even more than this, his words remind us of the “why” of our faith. In our baptism, we have been marked and sealed as Christ’s own. Forever. And this is not a superficial mark nor a statement of fashion. It is, in many ways a spark — the beginning of the light of Christ within each of us. To be marked as Christ’s own forever is to be eternally charged with being the light and bringing the light into the world.

Essential to this work is understanding how our faith invites us to change. We shine Christ’s light brilliantly when we are adapting. God created us to adapt and change. Indeed, our need and desire

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22310, Milwaukie, OR 97269
Milwaukie: 2780 SE Harrison St., Suite 202, Milwaukie, OR 97222
Coos Bay: 420 Highland Ave, Coos Bay, OR 97420
www.ecwo.org | 503.636.5613



the
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH *in*
WESTERN OREGON

for confession, forgiveness and reconciliation are at the heart of our capacity to be adaptable. It is impossible to be the light of Christ and to bring the light of Christ into the world if we resist change - the call to be transformed.

The pairing of stability and adaptability have enormous power and promise for us as a diocese. Without stability at the center - without peace and trust in God's presence in our lives - we are vulnerable to the many ways that fear, distrust, and anxiety scatter us and keep us from uniting as the Body of Christ.

Without the capacity to adapt - without eagerness to see and hear what God is calling us into next - we are vulnerable to looking back with such longing that we completely miss the promise of the light up ahead.

The Body of Christ that has its shape and form as the Episcopal Church in Western Oregon, continues to be called forward in life-giving and transformational ways.

In this past year, we have begun the process of relocating the Diocesan Support Center. This decades old dream is being fulfilled through faith and trust that God is calling us, in our western Oregon context, to reveal the light of Christ in new ways made possible by two new locations. The opening of the Coos Bay location, Shepherd House, has made it possible for me to be present in the rural part of our diocese for extended times. We have been able to visit our churches, hold meetings at Shepherd House, and establish deeper connections by being available for in-person visits.

Although the permanent location of the Diocesan Support Center has not yet been identified, our staff is benefiting from the teamwork that our temporary location is facilitating. The proximity of our offices and workstations makes communication easier and collegiality stronger. The practical challenges of the temporary space have been navigated with grace and good humor by our staff - one of the many assets of our team.

Speaking of our team, I want to highlight some of the good work that has produced wonderful fruit for the spiritual health and well-being of our diocese.

Earlier this year, we rolled-out our new website, logo, and color scheme. Alli Gannett's creative initiative and commitment to this work has refreshed our diocesan presence with contemporary elegance and simplicity. With this accomplishment in hand, Alli is now focusing her talent on storytelling across the diocese. You will be seeing more of her work in the months to come as she moves around the diocese collecting stories and interviews.

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22310, Milwaukie, OR 97269
Milwaukie: 2780 SE Harrison St., Suite 202, Milwaukie, OR 97222
Coos Bay: 420 Highland Ave, Coos Bay, OR 97420
www.ecwo.org | 503.636.5613



the
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH *in*
WESTERN OREGON

We are well aware of the ongoing concerns regarding our finance team, its management and responsiveness. I am grateful to the Holy Spirit who made it possible to bring Anne Marie Lowe onto our team. Our work in this area continues as we assess the scope of the work along with the changing needs of the diocese. Many of you have already enjoyed the responsiveness to calls and emails since Anne Marie has joined us. Her portfolio includes property management expertise as well, and this has already proven essential as we assist congregations seeking to redirect and reshape the use of their buildings.

This year has seen the first cohort of people seeking to enter into discernment through the diocesan discernment communities. Derek Moyer has guided the Commission on Ministry in this effort to re-think formation for the future of a changing church. We look forward to the new formation program for deacons which is another project Derek is leading and about which he has shared great excitement.

If your congregation has been in transition recently, Chris Craun, our Canon to the Ordinary, needs no introduction. She is the one who walks with congregations as they begin the process of calling their next priest to serve as rector or vicar. And yet, there is so much more on her plate! Her passion for youth and young adults in our church will continue to be an important part of her work. This last summer she led a group of youth to the Episcopal Youth Event in Maryland. And during the program year, she organizes and facilitates gatherings for the youth - a program she calls "Light and Hope." Chris' commitment to young people in our diocese is without a doubt among the most important ministries God is calling this diocese into for the future of the church.

Although she shies away from the spotlight, Tracy Esguerra, my Executive Assistant is essential to keeping my work life organized and deserves unending praise. Tracy keeps me on track by unapologetically interrupting me to remind me of my next appointment. The image I have of her masterful handling of so many details is as a juggling artist spinning plates. She also reminds me to eat lunch.

If you call our office during business hours, the voice you will hear is Tamara Knowles'. In addition to being that friendly and helpful person on the phone, Tamara takes care of a myriad details that keeps our day-to-day work from getting frayed at the edges. She had a key role in the move out of our old place and into our current space.

Beto Arciniega, our Missioner for Latino Ministries, is a quiet, constant, and reliable team member. He pastors the Latino ministries of our diocese both as a member of the diocesan team, and also as priest and leader of the Latino congregation at St. Michael's and All Angels. Beto has provided

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22310, Milwaukie, OR 97269
Milwaukie: 2780 SE Harrison St., Suite 202, Milwaukie, OR 97222
Coos Bay: 420 Highland Ave, Coos Bay, OR 97420
www.ecwo.org | 503.636.5613



the
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH *in*
WESTERN OREGON

translation for this diocese on a scale that is astonishing, and his humble service runs the risk of often being overlooked.

Emily Karr, my Chancellor, has provided countless hours of counsel regarding our Constitution and Canons and well as helping us assemble a group of attorneys who provide legal expertise in the areas of real estate, insurance, and employment for our diocese. Her guidance with respect to the current lawsuit with the City of Brookings has helped to identify legal counsel that continues to serve us well.

Our diocesan treasurer, Kathy Gordon, brings a wealth of experience as a CPA to our finance and budget management. Her commitment to clarity, engaging questions with integrity, and teamwork has added tremendously to our overall efforts regarding diocesan finances.

Laura Sheridan-Campbell, our Secretary to the Convention serves in a variety of ways helping to organize, manage and record the work of the Board of Trustees as well as the work of our Diocesan Convention. Laura reminds me of the *Ever Ready Bunny* - she never seems to run out of energy. Even more, she is constant with her compassion and gratitude in all things.

I am grateful to our team for their joyful and creative adaptability. Our diocese is fully equipped to lean into change and growth because of their gifts.

The changes that are occurring in the world around us constitute a context into which we are called to speak and act as followers of Christ. Some of these changes have a direct impact on us as well. The culture of secularism in this part of the world can sometimes feel discouraging. We don't enjoy a cultural assumption that church and church-life are typical or even normal. I encourage us to find our identity in this tension.

Stability is available to us as the fruit of spiritual practices. Through prayer—both corporate and individual— we deepen our identity in Christ. This identity has its fullness in the knowledge that, in God, we know a peace that surpasses understanding. Because of this we trust that we are perfectly safe, that all will be well even though we do not control the how and the when.

This trust is at the center of our capacity to adapt. Adaptive change, for Christians, is fueled by trust and hope that the light of Christ within us has the power to transform lives: our own as well as others. We build the capacity to adapt through our practices of forgiveness. One of the most important gifts God has given us is to have hearts that truly see and hear. What we learn, because of this gift, is not only that we are loved beyond all understanding, but that we have the ability to hurt others and are therefore called to repair the damage we have done.

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22310, Milwaukie, OR 97269
Milwaukie: 2780 SE Harrison St., Suite 202, Milwaukie, OR 97222
Coos Bay: 420 Highland Ave, Coos Bay, OR 97420
www.ecwo.org | 503.636.5613



the
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH *in*
WESTERN OREGON

When we do the work of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation we have laid the foundation to be adaptive — to understand that our transformation in Christ is always about change ... about looking up ahead to see where the light of Christ is shining ... and to follow.

The Cross provides the perfect symbol for stability and adaptability. Our life in Christ - to be marked as Christ's own forever - is our stability: the vertical piece of the cross. Our life together as the Body of Christ - our differences always seeking a resonance such that we each reflect the light of Christ - is how we practice adaptability: the horizontal piece of the cross.

The intersection of these two: stability = the vertical, and adaptability = the horizontal is a place of tension. This tension, when lived faithfully in hope and joy, is creative.

We are living this creative reality today in our diocese. We are undergoing changes and challenges. We are seeking to understand what is up ahead. We are praying with persistence and unceasingly to know the way of Jesus right now and in this place.

This is all good and faithful work that we are called into. Many of our faith communities are engaging this creative tension by asking, "What is the Spirit calling us into in this time? How might we partner with others to serve our community?"

For some the response is providing food and hot meals for the hungry, or hosting portable housing for the houseless, or working with the city or county to provide shelter from the cold, or making Christmas gift baskets for families in need. And some are asking deep and faithful questions about the next chapter for their faith community. For some, the response may be to let go of the old to make way from something new.

Across our diocese, the Holy Spirit is moving and creating. We are partners in this creativity when we live at the intersection of stability and adaptability. It is in this place of faithful unknowing that the Spirit often makes herself known.

At our Annual Meeting last year, I talked about our involvement in the Diocesan Vitality Initiative, sponsored by Episcopal Church Foundation. Our team continues in this work collecting facts about our diocese and asking big questions about our capacity to fulfill our mission in a rapidly changing world.

I also introduced the Diocesan Redevelopment focus last year. This team has assembled an outline for the process that will guide faith communities seeking to explore redeveloping their campuses.

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22310, Milwaukie, OR 97269
Milwaukie: 2780 SE Harrison St., Suite 202, Milwaukie, OR 97222
Coos Bay: 420 Highland Ave, Coos Bay, OR 97420
www.ecwo.org | 503.636.5613



the
**EPISCOPAL
CHURCH in**
WESTERN OREGON

This outline is available on our diocesan website. The first fruit of this effort is the plan to build an affordable housing project at the site of Ss. Peter and Paul on 82nd Avenue [in Portland]. This redevelopment of one of our faith community campuses is a concrete example of the way of the cross — living in the tension of adaptability and stability.

Living in the creative tension between stability and adaptability is at once system-wide (as we ask big questions about our mission) and very inter-personal. The rhythm of our prayer life shapes each of us as we examine our own lives and the way we have treated others. At the core of our mission and ministry as a diocese is our individual capacity to reflect the light of Christ and to do so as one amongst thousands of others doing the same. One of the important ways we do this is by *moving over and making room for others*. We do this by understanding our own limitations as we lift up the gifts of others. Our call, as a diocese, is to engage in reconciliation to mend broken relationships present and past.

To help us in this work, I am excited to announce The Rev. Ernestein Flemister as our new Missioner for Racial Reconciliation. Ernestein will join the diocesan team on a part-time basis and will assist our faith communities seeking to engage racial reconciliation and healing.

Our hope is in the reconciling love we know in God’s mysterious work through the cross. We live into our Christian identity at the intersection of the vertical and horizontal - the place where stability and adaptability intersect. We are equipped - through our baptism - to live into this holy tension and to cooperate with God to shine the light of Christ in new and life-giving ways.

I will close with the scripture readings I shared at the beginning. I invite us to listen with prayerful attention for the call to stability and adaptability:

From Isaiah, “O God, you will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are fixed on you; for in returning and rest we shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be our strength.”

And 2nd Corinthians, “It is not ourselves that we proclaim; we proclaim Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus’ sake. For the same God who said, “Out of darkness let light shine,” has caused his light to shine within us, to give the light of revelation—the revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever.

Amen.

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22310, Milwaukie, OR 97269
Milwaukie: 2780 SE Harrison St., Suite 202, Milwaukie, OR 97222
Coos Bay: 420 Highland Ave, Coos Bay, OR 97420
www.ecwo.org | 503.636.5613



the
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH *in*
WESTERN OREGON

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 22310, Milwaukie, OR 97269
Milwaukie: 2780 SE Harrison St., Suite 202, Milwaukie, OR 97222
Coos Bay: 420 Highland Ave, Coos Bay, OR 97420
www.ecwo.org | 503.636.5613