

The Bishop's Address

The 49th Annual Meeting of the Convention of the Diocese of Hawai'i
Seto Hall, 'Iolani School, Honolulu, Hawai'i
Saturday, October 21, 2017
The Right Reverend Robert L. Fitzpatrick, Bishop

The Video Clip

Thank you.

This is the 11th time that I have stood before you to deliver my Convention address. I do so this year with a sense of renewal and personal revitalization. The short video you've just seen highlights why I am renewed. In the stories of these three churches we have heard the proclamation of the Gospel lived in our midst.

The Three Churches

These three churches are being highlighted not because they're unique, but because they have been at the forefront of the renewal of the Episcopal Church in Hawaii. For you see, in the past decade, these three churches have had the most spectacular growth in terms of ministries and in terms of average Sunday attendance. In ten years, these three very different churches have grown by over 75%. Frankly, ten years ago, I might have pondered in my heart that these congregations would decline and be near closing – if not closed – by now. The Holy Spirit had other plans. Thank God that I was wrong.

What does a church in urban Honolulu have in common with a church upcountry on the Big Island and the church with no resident priest amidst dry lava mounds? Being with those churches, I can tell you that they are boldly faithful. They not only care for their neighbors, they expect those they serve will become part of their Church 'ohana.

On my last visit to St. Jude's, I confirmed nine -- most of whom had come into the church taking showers and sharing a meal on Saturday. They were just as warmly welcome on Sunday morning.

At St. James, worship might mean being down on the beach, at a church in Waimea or in Paauilo. It is still one 'Ohana – one family and God.

At St. Elizabeth's, the cacophony of languages sounds like Pentecost.

They share the bold face of Jesus Christ. These are people of God who are not afraid to fail, and who celebrate every little triumph.

Bold faith, engaged service, courageous hearts and much food permeate the lives of these congregations.

They are living Matthew 28:18-20: “Jesus came near and spoke to them, ‘I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.’”

Jesus Christ is with them.

Such congregations give me hope for the future and strengthen me, as your Bishop, for the present.

Well done my sisters and brothers.

Lessons from the Strategic Initiatives Group

I must also tell you that I have been empowered and strengthened by my work with the Strategic Initiatives Group (Keane Akao, Mahi Beimes, John Decker, Dixie Kaetsu, David Kennedy, Ryan Kusumoto, Ryan Newman, Jar Pasalo, and Dick Tardiff) and our consultant, Dr. Kim Payton. We have spent the last year pouring over surveys, the results of small group gatherings, and individual interviews with members of the Diocese.

They have helped me see that over the last 10 years and through two major strategic plans we did what we said we would do. We consistently reduced the assessment rate on congregations from year-to-year. In that time, the giving of the members of our congregations went up so that there was actually little impact on the diocesan budget. We did this during the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. We reduced the size of the governance bodies and of committees and of the bishop’s staff. We downsized and yet we got the work done.

We said we would expand opportunities for outreach ministries. In the past 10 years, more Episcopalians are involved with food banks and soup kitchens, shower ministries and laundry ministries, community gardens and vans. We care for the hungry and the homeless. I am proud of the people of this Diocese.

We have lived the admonition in the Letter of James (2:14-17): “*My brothers and sisters, what good is it if people say they have faith but do nothing to show it? Claiming to have faith can’t save anyone, can it? Imagine a brother or sister who is naked and never has enough food to eat. What if one of you said, ‘Go in peace! Stay warm! Have a nice meal!’? What good is it if you don’t actually give them what their body needs? In the same way, faith is dead when it doesn’t result in faithful activity.*”

We have called out and ordained more local candidates to the priesthood and the diaconate headed any time since we became a diocese in 1969. The local formation program – Waolaihui‘ia – is up and going. We said that we would have more local clergy with family ties and deep roots in these islands and that is now a reality.

Concerns of the Diocese

An important piece of the work of the Strategic Initiatives Group, however, was the realization that just because we did what we said we would do in our strategic plans, there is still a deep concern. Now don't get me wrong, we have done a great deal and some congregations are thriving. But we have not addressed an underlying anxiety in many of our congregations and certainly in the minds of some of our leaders that things aren't quite what they should be. We have several congregations that have had amazing growth in members and in ministries, but others are in decline or are stagnant. There is worry that more of our sisters and brothers in the seats on Sunday are over the age of 75 than under the age of 35. There was also an expression of burnout of long time leaders. And many more congregations now have part-salaried clergy who have full-time secular jobs. In other words, some of us are worried and we know we have to learn new ways of being the church.

Opportunities in the Diocese

From the gatherings and surveys, the Strategic Initiatives Group also helped me see that we have new leaders emerging. Most of the clergy in charge congregations and serving as chaplains in schools have been in the Diocese less than five years. Many of our clergy are younger and bring new insights. With the passing of leaders from an earlier generation, we are beginning to see new lay leaders. We have new opportunities and new possibilities, if we have the faith and courage to try to do new things and to make room for new voices in our midst.

What we heard from the members of the Diocese was a passionate desire for spiritual renewal. I was also struck by the fact that Episcopalians in Hawai'i like one another and that the laypeople want to work together. We want to build closer relationships with one another so that we can serve others. We want to share what is going well.

We have a deep faith in Jesus Christ, but we're not always sure how to share that faith or how to make room for others in our 'ohana. Interestingly, we heard the same thing from the clergy. They too want to develop a deeper relationship with God and with one another. They too want to find new ways to welcome others into our churches.

We want to live more fully the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) when Jesus said, "*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.*"

The Strategic Plan

The vision for the Diocese in the Strategic Plan is quite simple: "**The Diocese of Hawai'i is spiritually nourished and engaged.**"

This vision will allow the Diocese to work toward these objectives (objectives that we overwhelmingly heard you wanted):

- Nurture our congregations to claim a spiritual identity that is vibrant and engaged. We have to clear that we are first and foremost followers of Jesus Christ. And that as Episcopalians, our hearts, our minds and our hands are open.

- Encourage the development of relationships among the members of our congregations – both those new to the church and those who have been around a while – so that we will eagerly share a fresh and energetic faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, we have to learn to better communicate our faith – as individuals, as congregations and as a diocese.
- Foster a greater sense of ‘ohana within the Diocese, especially among lay and clergy leaders. We are “One Team” working together.
- Encourage a Diocese-wide spiritual awakening that will draw people to the joyful faith presence of Jesus Christ in our churches.
- Invest time, talent and treasure in the spiritual vitality of our Diocese, which in turn will enhance our human and financial resources for mission.
- Empower our churches to be the Body of Christ in their local communities. Service is a witness to faith.
- Create safe, pastoral environments where individuals can talk openly and share the stories of their spiritual journeys and how they have been transformed by their faith in Jesus Christ.
- Achieve greater clarity in our churches of the importance of compliance with the policies of the Diocese and The (“national”) Episcopal Church. This may sound odd, but it is about how we work together.

Overview of the Goals

These objectives will be lived by acting on three goals:

- (1) The Diocese is committed to developing and sustaining spiritual growth, vitality, curiosity, and well-being within our churches.
- (2) The Diocese seeks to strengthen our identity as one ‘ohana and the relationships within our ‘ohana among clergy, lay leaders and congregations.
- (3) The Diocese is focused on improving the capacity for communication within our congregations, across the Diocese, and into our communities as we engage in evangelism

Design teams are the means we will use to fulfill these goals. Design teams are an alternative way to implement a strategic plan. The traditional way to implement strategic plans is through the functional units of the organization. That approach is limited for organizations that have a minimal functional structure, and where it has become difficult to recruit people into the traditional committee structure. Both of these limitations apply to us as the Episcopal Diocese in Hawai‘i.

The Teams with seven to ten members will be called to develop strategies with projects/activities that can be evaluated and then to be modified or stopped. The work cannot be top down, but must engage the local congregations to mutually discern what is needed and to call out new leaders.

We are seeking to shape the very being of the Diocese.

You will see that this Strategic Plan is about the very being of the Diocese and not one list of things to do. How can we empower the leaders of the Diocese (Apostles) so that God's people can be effective Disciples? Remember, disciples are "learners" who grow into leaders, apostles. We make disciples to send them out as apostles.

We are looking to be the Body of Christ. We want to live into James 3:13-18: *"Are any of you wise and understanding? Show that your actions are good with a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom. However, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, then stop bragging and living in ways that deny the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. Instead, it is from the earth, natural and demonic. Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and everything that is evil. What of the wisdom from above? First, it is pure, and then peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine. Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts."*

As the Bishop

What does this mean for me as Bishop?

My focus must be on teaching the faith and the formation of leaders (apostles). This is what you most affirmed and desired from me in ministry. We know this might take many forms. I will have to be open to the direction of the Design Teams and follow the advice of the Standing Committee.

I will tell you, that in this time of renewal I have found new excitement in engaging with congregations. I have also found my life of prayer deepened by my study of Franciscan spirituality and of a deeper connection with the Society of St. Francis, the Religious order of the Episcopal Church. I look forward to sharing with the Diocese my learnings about prayer and the spiritual life, and of my renewed delight in the Gospel of Matthew and the Letter of James. I understand these to be deeply connected to our renewal as a Diocese and my ministry as your servant.

From you, however, as the leaders of the Diocese, much we'll be asked. As the clergy and lay delegates to this Convention, you are the leaders of the Diocese – the apostles – in our time. You will be called to deepen your faith in Jesus Christ. You will be called to be engaged and to participate – to act with faithful courage. Practically, I need you to help find the best people to serve on the first three Design Teams. We must find those people to help shape the Diocese to best serve our leaders – lay and ordained – and our congregations, so that they may serve others and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thanks

As I conclude, a word of thanks.

Again to the members of the Strategic Initiatives Group (Keane Akao, Mahi Beimes, John Decker, Dixie Kaetsu, David Kennedy, Ryan Kusumoto, Ryan Newman, Jar Pasalo, and Dick Tardiff) and our Consultant, Kim Payton, thank you.

I am always grateful to my staff for all that they do: Mr. Danny Casey, Ms. Rae Costa, the Rev. Cn. Alexander Graham, Ms. Fane Lino, Mr. Sonny Liu and Ms. Irina Martikainen.

I also need to mention the Camp Board and especially Brian Grieves who has taken up special duties as Interim Executive Director during the search for a new Executive Director. I am much less worried with Moki Hino as the priest-in-charge at the Cathedral. A simple “thank you” is not enough for those who take up the slack at difficult times correcting the course of these important parts of our diocesan ‘ohana. I do appreciate your service.

I am also thankful that ‘Iolani School has again graciously allowed to have the Annual Meeting of our Convention here on campus.

I have two others to thank. As always, my ministry is what it is only because Bea stands with me. After over thirty-five years of marriage, a mere thank you doesn’t seem nearly enough. I also must thank my grandson, Marcus, for coming over every Monday that I’m in town to play (really the thanks goes to Liis for bringing him over). He brings new avenues of relaxation and joy – and even – unusually for me – afternoon naps.

Lastly, I can’t let this time go by without giving thanks for the life of Bishop Richard Chang. I thanked him personally in last year’s address without a passing thought that he wouldn’t be here this year. I will miss my mentor and friend. Thank you Dick.

Final Prayer

The earliest Franciscan manuscripts ascribe the following prayer to Francis himself and they tell us that it was offered before the Crucifix in San Damiano [see Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, p. 40]:

*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.*

In the end, this is the way of St. Francis: to seek and to do God's will with bold faith, hearty joy and profound thanksgiving. This has become a part of my daily prayer and I think this is the way our Diocese has decided to follow.

May God grant us the sense, knowledge and faithful courage to follow where Christ leads.
Amen.

Response

I have asked Dixie Kaetsu, a member of the Strategic Initiatives Group and the Diocesan Counsel, to offer her insights on this Address and the work of the Strategic Initiatives Group.
Dixie, thank you.