



Intro: You're listening to Crossings Conversations from Church Divinity School of the Pacific, a show about leaders creating Christian community and sharing God's love.

Kyle Oliver: Hey everyone, this is your host, Kyle Oliver, and before we get started, I just wanted to say a little something about what we're up to here. This is our first episode of Crossings Conversations, and what we're trying to do is give you an opportunity to go deeper with some of the folks we talk to as we produce Crossings magazine, a twice a year publication of Church Divinity School of the Pacific, and so, this first set of conversations are gonna be with Bishops and other leaders from around the country who we talked to and asked a series of questions about their views on the future leadership needs of the Church, and so we're hearing first from Bishop Megan Traquair of Northern California, and we had a great conversation about, among other things, a very old tradition of forming Christians. So we hope you enjoy the conversation.

Kyle: Well, this is Kyle Oliver from Church Divinity School of the Pacific, and I am here with Bishop Megan Traquair from the diocese of Northern California. Bishop Megan, thanks so much for being with us.

Bishop Megan Traquair: Thank you. It's great to have a chance to be with you here today. I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Kyle: We're going to be talking about the future of leadership formation in the church. To kick that off, I thought I would ask since you've been serving in your current position, and it'd be great if you could tell us how long that's been, how has your thinking about leadership formation changed?

Bishop Megan: Thank you. That is a great question and definitely one that is in the forefront of my thinking as a bishop. I am still a new-ish bishop and I'm what, two months past my one year anniversary as well as part way through once COVID hit. Prior to being the bishop of the diocese of Northern California, I had a chance to serve on another diocesan staff and that was in the diocese of Arizona. It means that I have been engaging in that eagle eye view, at least the practice of it, for a little bit longer than how long I've been bishop.

Being bishop, it definitely has a buck stops here aspect to it in many, many areas. One of those has to do with the leadership in the church. I am really interested in leadership formation for our

lay leaders and for our clergy, but I'm going to speak about formation for our clergy, particularly our priests who will be in charge of our churches. You've asked, 'What has changed?' and I have to tell you my vision has crystallized and gotten clearer. What I believe is that we need to enlarge to build the capacity of our clergy and members but our clergy as believers and as leaders. It's two sides of that. The believer side really has to come first. I take that to mean that we are active in our worship, our adoration, our prayer, a personal relationship with a living God. That has to be what drives it. Nothing else is sufficient for this work or for faithful living in the world. There are simply too many impediments, too many disappointments, too many small hurts that come on the way. That's got to be first, that we are, as much as we can be fully converted believers and followers of Jesus Christ. I have ideas about that.

The other thing I have ideas about is we really need to gain more skill as leaders, people who gather, people who can engage in partnerships in the community, who are willing to and can engage with the organizational structure in our church. It turns out that is not optional, really have to be able to engage with that because there are resources that come to us with that structure, and I want my clergy to have as many resources as possible.

I'll tell you that one resource on the leadership side that I am bringing is a course in nonprofit management, a certificate process from Arizona State University. This is a program I pioneered in the diocese of Arizona. When you're done, you end up with a Certificate in nonprofit management from ASU. You also get the diocese on there but I have to tell you employers, they're not as thrilled about that, but they like seeing that there is a big university, and this is going to be online.

This is something that is suitable for folks after seminary because we are taking the most up-to-date solutions that other nonprofits are finding because the church is a nonprofit and we are on a mission from God. They're both true. If there are other folks who are tackling aspects of what we are doing and bringing forward good thinking and active engagement, we should have access to that. That's what we're doing, but it's best learned once you are in the trenches. It is theoretical until that point.

I believe in equipping people and giving them tools and on the leadership side, that is one that I'll be bringing to my diocese this fall, and that will be available to lay leaders and to clergy. I anticipate we will expand that window to include ecumenical partners. Lutherans and Methodists were active participants in Arizona. What do we need in our leaders? It is clear to me that we need people who have increasing capacity as believers and as leaders, folks who gather people and can engage.

Kyle: Is there a story or a testimonial or an anecdote that sticks out about the folks who participated in that program while you were in Arizona?

Bishop Megan: Yes, I have to say this arose, the needs were identified when Bishop Kirk Smith, who was the diocesan then, was meeting with a bunch of the younger clergy. He asked them what they needed, and they said that they needed training they could not get elsewhere. They needed training that essentially was how to help a nonprofit, how to manage that. That put our heads together to think about how to provide that.

The examples I would give of that, beyond the fact that we now have three graduates of that program who are bishops in the church today. Myself, Bishop Susan Snook in San Diego, Bishop Poulson Reed in Oklahoma who actually found it so interesting he went right back to ASU and took the full course. The stories I will tell you is that the lay people, they get it faster. The terminology, "They do not get wrapped around the axle on terminology the way we clergy

often do'. The philosophical part just roars to the front of our minds sometimes obliterating the learning that's coming at us.

I will tell you that one priest that I spoke to had had a long standing difficulty with the considerable financial structure, the management thereof, in his parish. \

In fact, it had thwarted the last two rectors because it needed to be adjusted. He took the skills that he learned with that program and was able to form partnerships and coalitions, name his mission effectively, bring them along and got them to agree to change their structure and their term limits. This seriously rearranged the power structure on that so that it became more fruitful, more nimble and no longer a point of contention. That was a pretty good outcome.

Kyle: There's an organizational piece and potentially also a fiscal piece there. Is that what you're saying?

Bishop Megan: Yes. We definitely talk about not just stewardship but also the basics of financial management and what we should be doing, what is the right role of a board, which are great skills. Of course, we don't get them in seminary and of course, we still need them. We need them once we're confronted with the challenges.

Kyle: That's a rich model. I really like that. Well, before we move on, let's double back to your breadcrumb about forming leaders as believers. You said you had thoughts.

Bishop Megan: I do, I do, and you'll hear me return to this. I really believe that the formation of disciples is one of the key things that we do as a church. We have often assumed that a couple of inquirer's classes and sitting in the pew is going to get you there. Our wide-swinging back door and the number of folks who call themselves Nones tell us how effective that is. The answer is it's only effective for a few folks who are already completely lined up on that glide path.

In fact, we are called to reach many people with different needs, different backgrounds, different ways of thinking. We need a tool that is intentional and flexible. You'll hear me talk about this repeatedly, but I am a true believer in what we call the catechumenal process, and that process is the ancient church pattern of how we form believers which involves essentially a one-on-one mentorship, small group that whose primary focus is scripture, usually the Sunday gospel scripture on one hand and on the other hand, whatever is happening in the lives of the people in that group of the seekers. That is the curriculum.

Our Lord is the teacher on that. I love to teach and I definitely, I'd love to engage in this. In fact, they do not need clergy teaching on this. It is, that's a Bible study best led by your most mature lay believer. What I have found is that when one goes into intentional formation, and it doesn't have to be the catechumenal process but the elements need to remain the same, and they are often the same. Small group work, focus on scripture and one's life and being able to name the activity of God as we see it in our lives and in other people's lives.

Kyle: Why does this matter, things that matter to me.

Bishop Megan: Exactly. I have to tell you I think that is just a critical part and clergy need to have that intensive formation and need to have a connection. There's nothing like being on the front line of seeing the power of God at work in someone's life to roll you forward with joy and energy and hope that then spills out because clergy are broadcasters, spills out to everyone you engage with. If you're talking with the police chief, if you're talking to the library, if you're talking

to the soccer-- whoever it is, it conveys back out. We have to close that, that circle and that loop and intentional, deep process of the conversion of life is how it happens and how it's meant to happen.

Kyle: Let's shift gears a little bit here. I'm curious if there's a story or two that you've heard from seminarians, and it certainly doesn't have to just be CDSP seminarians, but seminarians or recent graduates or other new leaders. Are there stories that you're hearing that make you especially hopeful for the future of the church?

Bishop Megan: Absolutely, I hear good stories on a regular basis. I'd like to share two of those. One is a story from one of your own graduates, Portia, and she's now a transitional deacon. In her internship, she did work on evangelism and worked with one of our churches on that, and just had a great new take on how to engage with people, how to reach out. I believe that one of the things they were looking at was the very close to them city college, that community. She did that good work. I would not be surprised if a book eventually came out of this from Portia. Now that she's moving into a curacy, she's going to be taking that gift and bringing it full speed to the congregation where she is going to serve. Well, this is a wonderful gift. I'm really excited about seeing what's going to happen from that partnership.

The second story I'll tell you is the way one of a priest introduced himself into a community. This is a story about Ken Katona who was a graduate from VTS. Do you know Ken?

Kyle: Classmate of mine. Yes, I do.

Bishop Megan: Ken came to pastor a small church in central Arizona, primarily cotton growing. As he arrived, he wanted to get to know his neighborhood. I think on within his first week, possibly the first day, he drove in, suited up, of course, and wanted to just walk down the street and get to know his neighborhood. Well, he discovered that they were having a festival and there were all sorts of folks there. This was the annual festival so this was great. He's walking around in true Ken fashion introducing himself to everybody and sees that they have some karaoke thing going on there.

Of course, jumps on the stage, when invited, and bells out some-- He can do everything from pure rock and roll to opera. I think this was the rock and roll and of things. It might have involved an air guitar. I'm not sure. His introduction to that community was, in fact, the way he decided to engage that community exactly where they were in exactly the language they were using. It was a fabulous beginning.

He went on to make friends with leaders in that fire department. He had made a powerful connection with the younger families in that area. You have to realize that this is a man who also loves to wear a biretta and is devout in his worship of our Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks both current culture and the deep faith of the church and he can mend them together beautifully. I have great stories from our younger leaders. Ken's been out for a little while now. I can't wait to see what going to be coming down the line.

Kyle: That's a great story. I'm delighted to hear that. I'm wondering if you could commission or co-teach, either one depending on if you wanted to be involved, some special topics course with any instructor and any topic for today's seminarians, who would you invite to teach and what would you call the course?

Bishop Megan: Excellent. I have to have two folks depending on their schedules. One of them frankly would be Bishop Curry. I know that's an easy piece but Bishop Curry is not only a

dynamic speaker but he has been teaching us about the way of love. He has named those, that curving path that draws us right around to the center again and again of how we turn, learn, worship, I'm not going to name all of those pieces correctly.

Kyle: Worship, pray, rest, go, bless, not in that order.

Bishop Megan: Exactly, so all of those. That rule of life is a powerful one. I'd love to join with him in teaching that on any front, period. If I could ask him to join with me to teach, I would like to talk with seminarians about this ancient practice of forming a living faith, the catechumenate. I would like to experiment with our students about how this might reach out to many different settings. What is brilliant about this process is that the stages of growth and personal commitment, they really do-- The ancient church captured just how the human psyche works in those stages. This is the remarkable bit, which separates it out from other small group work. Those stages are connected to the church year. What I discovered was that the church year is a massive engine whirling around. We just see it change the collects and the colors, and those liturgical seasons are powerful.

But let me tell you I have seen all of the horsepower engaged when you have folks on their way to becoming believers, making those prayers and going through those steps in conjunction with those turning points of the liturgical year which, which of course, is the year that follows the life of Jesus.

The Episcopal Church, I think has had, at least in the default thinking, upper-middle class, pretty academic idea about what formation is and it's mostly a transfer of information which is different from the internal formation of the heart giving us the tools we need to live as active, practicing believers. The church is supposed to be a community of practice. How do you actually do that?

I would love to work with Bishop Curry in thinking about how to teach this, how this folds in with his own rule of life that he is encouraging us. I would hope that he and I would send us out in experiments to try something and then to come back and become our own community of learning and practice and see what this intentional formation might bring and how we will reshape that process using those basic pieces as we discover what the needs are. How do we do this for folks who have two jobs? Good question. How do we do this for folks who are glued into club sports? Excellent question. I think we can answer those questions. That's what I would like to do.

Kyle: That looks lovely. If you'll permit me one second of geek out, the thing that I love, you said community of practice. As a scholar of education, I guess the thing that so resonates with me around that way of thinking about learning and growth is that it came out of research about apprenticeship, and that apprenticeship learning model is just so much more resonant.

Bishop Megan: You just need one seeker, one mentor, a leader and probably one other person who will come along because they love the Lord and want to be part of this. That is the essentials and it can do the work and do amazing stuff. I believe it's a model that does not depend on large numbers of paid staff. In fact, this is the apostolic inheritance that we have been given in its richness. I feel like it is a treasure chest we've barely crack open, that we may be at the time where strange circumstances are going to draw us to really dive in much more deeply.

Kyle: Yes, I agree. The disciples did not have publishing houses and fancy educational technology and all that. They had small groups of folks, and each other and the witness of Christ.

From your perspective, what's a change we could make to how leaders are trained in the Episcopal Church that would make a positive difference for our future.

Bishop Megan: You already know that I really believe in building capacity and tools. One of the changes, it doesn't come at the seminary level, it comes with parish level, and that is that our folks enter into seminary not deeply formed. This also comes in with commission on ministry. We would hope that folks already know and love The Book of Common Prayer, already know and have fallen in love with God speaking to us in scripture. There's a serious work of formation that I think needs to happen before someone comes to seminary.

The next thing I would say is we still have a lot of remnants of the therapeutic model of priesthood, and this does not serve us well. That therapeutic model for all of its benefits, in its season, and its ability to help us think about the needs of folks has a fairly narrow view that often reduces folks to a sort of passive recipient of events as opposed to active folks who choose to act. Not that we are not to be caring and loving and seeking to bring the Lord's healing to the hurts that folks experience, they're real hurts. They're real injustices. There's a need for real healing, but I fear our focus has been small.

The fact is as a parish leader, if we cannot move forward until everybody is feeling fine, we will never move forward. Instead, I believe that the church has a charism for loving and supporting folks as they move forward in their healing but we do it on the move. We are peripatetic in that way and need to offer the healing while we move as opposed to having everything at a complete halt.

Kyle: Let's ask one last question. The question is what advice would you share with a seminary contemplating its future mission, its future role in the church, what should we be thinking about in the days ahead as CDSP?

Bishop Megan: That therapeutic model. I would underline that firmly because we need robust people who come out, emotionally mature people who can differentiate their own well-being from what's happening around them. I guess the ability to think creatively with scripture in one hand and the prayer book in the other. Again, these are resources that we sometimes come to second and third. That's really what I would look for, so I have to tell you strengthen the core and those core areas, I think will give us nimbleness to engage in those needs.

The last thing, and this may be mildly culturally heretical, I heard someone say that in some-- It spoke about how churches have been in the past coming to the US, ethnic churches. In Chicago, for instance, if you drive down you see beautiful big churches, and they were set up for the Lithuanians who were there, or the Polish Catholics who were there. There are wonderful goods that come with that ethnic church, but the Episcopal church has aspects of being an ethnic church and a British ethnic church. My grandmother was from Britain so I'm a perfect match and yet we need to adapt more. That adaptation I think it means knowing our central core and then being able to speak the language of our folks, not with Sherry, but with music and heart to heart formation. Our ethnic church is something we can engage in with gratitude, but it can be a unconscious straight jacket for us and probably does not serve us well in our current goals.

Kyle: Yes, it's a mode of tacit at best exclusion for a lot of folks.

Bishop Megan: Exactly, because our church very often does not reflect the folks around us. That socioeconomic divide is real for us. That means that we have to be willing to preach and teach in ways that are different from graduate-level education. I believe we want to do that. It's

the unconscious patterns that will trip us up, but frankly, learning to broaden how we welcome people in is so much more fun. It's really interesting and it's such a blessing to us.

Kyle: Amen to that. Bishop Megan, thank you so much for sharing your experience and wisdom and ideas with us today. We really appreciate it and look forward to how these and other trends are unfolding in the spirit and the diocese of Northern California.

Bishop Megan: Thank you very much. I appreciate having a time to explore some of these thoughts with you.

Outro: Crossings Conversations is a co-productions of Church Divinity School of the Pacific and Trinity Church Wall Street. If you enjoyed the show, please rate and review it on Apple Podcasts or share it with a colleague. You can learn more about the only Episcopal seminary on the west coast and subscribe to Crossings magazine at CDSP.edu