



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: Hi everyone, it's Kyle, and I wanted to let you know that we are speaking today with Bishop Marianne Budde of the Diocese of Washington. I had the pleasure of serving under Bishop Budde in my first role as a parish priest in the Diocese of Washington. I really admired then, and appreciated this opportunity to revisit the list of traits that Diocese of Washington uses in looking to spot new leadership talent, and we talked about that list and lots else in this conversation.

Kyle: This is Kyle Oliver, communications and marketing manager at Church Divinity School in the Pacific. I'm here with the Right Reverend, Marianne Edgar Budde, bishop of the Diocese of Washington. Bishop Budde, thanks so much for being with us.

Bishop Marianne Budde: It's great to be with you Kyle.

Kyle: This is a conversation about leadership formation in the church and the future of leadership formation. You've been bishop of Washington now for quite a while, and we want to start by asking, in the time that you've been in this role, how has your thinking about leadership formation changed?

Marianne: First of all, I'm impressed with the people that God seems to be tapping on the shoulder for leadership in church. There's a savviness to people and a eyes-wide-open quality to them. There don't seem to be too many rose-colored glasses in terms of seeing the church in and of its most idealistic expressions. I find that hopeful that people can love a church, feel called to serve it and yet, not be blinded by that love to the things that are in need of reformation or renewal.

I would say that I self correct also. We've taken approach to discernment to formation selecting of candidates for leadership that is much more function-oriented rather than call, in that we're assuming call, we just assume it that these people are

authentically called by God to be leaders in the church, possibly priests, but our question is discern if they have the right skill set and attributes that we feel the church needs in this moment.

I'm doing a little bit of that, shaping it as we go forward but there's no shortage of people that are interested and I find that to be really helpful. I would say what I see now more because I've been at this for a while is, I see what happens on the other side of seminary and when people come into their first positions, and so, what are the resilience factors or what does it look like as people get into the work itself? That's rich food for reflection as well.

Kyle: Yes. I'd love to follow up on a couple of things. I was living in the Diocese of Washington, serving the Diocese of Washington when those changes you mentioned went into place. You said you shifted to functional understandings of what it means to be called to leadership. Can you maybe give an example of maybe one kind of change that was in that?

Marianne: Sure, I'd be happy to do that. The idea was that, as I said, we didn't want to get into conversations about whether or not we heard a call but rather to assume call and then to ask what does the church need from its leaders today? That wasn't something we pulled out of the air. We actually did a lot of conversations among our laity across the diocese. Personal maturity and self-awareness is among the top of the list. The ability to think in an entrepreneurial way. What I mean by that is simply seeing opportunities where there are problems. To see a problem or struggle and to discern what the opportunities are. Things like that that are actually things you can talk about and you can on some level measure in a person either by the way they handle themselves in your presence and the track record that they bring.

I'll say one more thing that I learned from the Diocese of Texas is that unless a person is coming into the ordination process at a young age, and by young I mean under 30, I'm also looking for a track record. I'm looking for experiences that would demonstrate what the person is feeling called to. If they say they feel called to reaching people in a particular context, I want to see where they've done that if they're over 30. Things like that.

Kyle: Very cool. Thank you. That's helpful. The other thing I wanted to follow up on was the intriguing comment you made about how a bishop gets to see people on the other side of seminary and the kinds of joys and struggles they're in, I think was what you're implying. I wonder if you could say a little more about what it's like to accompany folks through that stage of their early ordained ministry.

Marianne: We place a high premium on placing people within the Diocese of Washington and so we work really hard at it invariably, I would say. There are a couple of really happy situations where a person comes into their ministry setting and it's just a perfect fit, the best possible context, the community that they've been praying for, all of those things, but that's rare.

There is a disappointment factor that comes into play pretty early on. That's not just true for people coming out of their educational formation phase, whatever that was, but that's true up and down the call experience, the sense of like, "Oh, this is what it is," or "This is what this church is," and "This is who I am in this role." Just getting a

sense of what that evokes in people and how they respond and also how we as mentors and coaches and I as bishop can guide people through that part of ministry.

Also quite frankly, the stress of it, and the stress of having to lead communities and congregations who may not fall very high on the scale of health or they may be perfectly healthy but they're dealing with really tough situations that didn't exactly fall into the ministry portfolio of what people thought their jobs were. That's the grittiness of ministry these days for most people.

Again, seeing how it's lived out in practice is something that I think I can spend more time on as a leader. More and more, I find myself wanting to invest energy there on diocesan resources so that we can have clear understandings for a job description that can be somewhat nebulous, like what their work actually is, and what their goals are, and how can we help clergy and their congregational leaders have honest conversations of what's expected or needed most say in the first three months, six, nine months, in a year. Put together ministry plans that allow for a person to feel like they're doing a good job and that they're having some measure of fruitfulness.

Kyle: Without wanting to pry into inappropriate details, I wonder if there's a story or two from seminarians or recent grads or just any new leaders that you've been serving with stories from that time that are making you hopeful these days?

Marianne: The people that come to mind most quickly for me in the diocese are our two groups. One is people that we were able to place through a partnership with the diocese, we're a 50-50 split, for a two-year process. A two-year commitment in a congregation with strategic potential that we could bring a person who was particularly gifted in areas that that church needed. We had to squirrel away a little bit of money to do this. We've done five now. Three of them just went really, really well both for the person and for the congregation.

In one of them, it didn't go well at all. It was just like we thought it was going to be a good fit, everyone was super excited and the chemistry was just off. To the person's credit and to the congregation's credit, they stuck it out. They learned what they could learn, but it was also good to have an endpoint, right? It wasn't a failure, it wasn't like, Oh my gosh, it blew up in everyone's faces. It just wasn't a great experience. Then the question is, how can you learn from a first experience that isn't great, but isn't so bad that you have to blow it all up or walk away, but at the same time, have a clean ending point?

I'm becoming more and more an advocate for all of us for the idea of renewable contracts, so that we don't have this open-ended sense of things or that the priest or minister has complete control over when a relationship ends.

The other one that comes to mind is someone who again, brought such giftedness and skill to our congregation, but what it really allowed us to do, and that person did amazing work in the church that he was in. In that case, and in one other, the fact that we have that program in place, allowed them to get some congregational chops where they needed it. Then they were perfectly poised for the next position that had their name on it. Do what I mean? It was in the diocese, and I was so happy because I just had this sense that these were the people that we most needed in these congregations and it came to pass. Those are some of the happy ones.

One other area that I'll mention is that we've been noticing more and more-- Your wife was at St. Stephen's in the Incarnation during her internship and one of the things that we're really coming to realize in our multicultural, and especially bilingual congregations, is that we absolutely need leaders now in our Spanish speaking congregations who are completely and comfortably able to function and to lead in both languages. It can't just be Spanish, it can't just be English. It has to be both.

Finding those people and raising them all who are native to one language and preferably a foreign language, and then able to thrive in an English speaking context as well, that that bridge leadership is just priceless.

Kyle: Am I hearing you right in thinking that you're seeing that probably looking for native speakers as much of recruitment as formation, right?

Marianne: Recruitment and formation but also moving-- much of the work in the diocese in Washington in ministry among people who spoke Spanish is where they were first-generation immigrants, right? First-generation immigrants, most coming from the Roman Catholic Church, although not all. We ordaining them and serving among a certain subset, usually a congregation that had a draw for Spanish speaking community, and what we're learning now, Kyle, is that we have to move into second and third generation ministry for both the leaders but also for the communities themselves.

That the majority of people that would self define is Latinx are English speakers and have adapted or want to adapt into a multicultural world that they want to experience and they want their culture represented or their many cultures represented in worship. It's not a ghetto for people who are of one cultural or immigrant experience alone. If that makes sense. It's much more fluid.

The one success and possibly two now, it's a little bit too early to tell, are when we've been able to find a leader who is a native Spanish speaker, often raised in another country or came to this country at a young age, but is also able to be a bridge to the predominant culture that surrounds their community. Those are fascinating dynamics-- changes I would say, in the leadership-- the leadership pool that we're looking for.

Kyle: I'd love now to invite you to think big. We've been having fun in this series thinking about if the sky were the limit in terms of recruitment of instructors, and you had the chance to commission, maybe co-teach, if you're interested, commission a seminary course with any instructor you can think of, what class would you want to see and who would you want to invite to teach it?

Marianne: I go in a number of different directions, but I think it's all in the same general area. That is whatever the context that you choose someone who can really help us, as teachers or guide for the rising generations of leaders to do contextual ministry well. I would say, in general, the Episcopal Church really needs more of us to have a real understanding of our culture in a way that we-- in aspects of our culture that we're more blind to than most.

For example, I would say, and COVID has accelerated this trend in some very helpful ways, that the reticence of Episcopalians in general, and I think this has to do

with our age, right? To embrace technology and the mission field of technology. Not just as a tool, but as a transformational space where community happens.

I often say to the congregations that I go to for celebrations of anniversaries-- this is the Diocese of Washington, right? So we have congregations that go back, some as many as 250, 300 years, and even those who were established at any point along that, those congregations can often tell me more about their history than they can tell me about their neighborhoods. How can we help leaders become apologists for the gospel in the time and the place where they find themselves?

Again, it depends on the context, if I would. Some people that come to mind who I think are especially good at this range from some of the real practitioners of particular kinds of Christianity that are thriving now. I think of Otis Moss the Third in Chicago with Trinity Church. Not only his unapologetically, we are a Black Christian Church in a mainline tradition, but also how he has embraced reaching rising generations and a broad cultural context.

Just as one example, if we were to try to think of how we might revitalize and renew our historically African American congregations or congregations that are predominantly or now in areas where we would want to raise up community, a really rich, deep, authentic community with a predominant expression of African American spirituality, he'd be one I'd want to lead with or listen to.

There are several people like him in the DC area that have done that, that I would tap if I could. As a cultural commentator and someone who's just constantly thinking of content, the future of the church would be Carey Nieuwhof, who has his multiple blogs. He's doing one now with Barna, and the head of David Kinnaman with Barna, it's called Church Pulse. They're doing just some fascinating research on church trends and population trends and what we're seeing.

That kind of thinking isn't something that Episcopalians in my experience, myself included, gravitate toward naturally. It's a helpful addition, I would say, even critical to where we are now. Those were a couple of people. I also think that Adam Hamilton because he has done the work of building an extraordinarily large and fruitful Methodist Church, he's a helpful example because Methodism is a close sibling to the Episcopal Church. What does it look like in a context where scale and technology and building community that can really have an impact on a community, where that can happen within the context of a mainline church. Just some of my thoughts.

I'll just say one more thing. In general, Episcopalians are very suspicious of scale. We often say things like it's not about the numbers. When we have very disparaging things to say about churches that are large because we paint them with one brush, which is really foolish on our part. Which isn't to say all that is big is good. It's just that if you look at the churches that are really helping to transform the culture for good or for ill, part of it is because they've taken that part of their work seriously.

Kyle: It's unlikely that a church gets large without answering some important questions about the needs of the community and the strength of the leadership.

Marianne: You don't drift towards that, and you don't get there by trying harder at the same things you're already doing. You really have to be a student of that and

disciplined and practiced. Again, this is changing, because we're awakening to more of our realities, but this is a hard sell in a lot of Episcopal circles. Again, the generational divide is—and I'm no spring chicken. I'm 60 years old—so this is not my native land, all these things I'm talking about. In some ways, I feel like my job is to create space, to set the agenda and the table and then to find the people who are thinking these things and moving in these circles and the rising generations within our own church and say, "How can we provide the resources to create the Church of the future and who are the leaders that we need?"

And I say that all the time to my peers, my generation and older, especially when we get hung up about the things we like and don't like. I keep on telling them, who told you that that was the most important question when you're in your 60s? The generativity questions are questions of making space for rising generations. Which isn't to say that all of the new leadership needs to be 22. I'm not saying that, but I am saying that we need to be weighted in that direction.

There are people that no matter their age, people of all generations just love spending time with them and you know who they are. They just love it because you feel prized and validated in their presence. That's the kind of leader that we want going both ways. Frankly, as a rising elder now, I really appreciate it when someone coming up behind me is mildly curious.

Kyle: We didn't want to lead with this question but we think it's an important question to ask. I'm curious about one change you might make at the seminary level, at the denominational level, however you want to take it. A change that you would make to how leaders are trained in the Episcopal Church, that you think might make a positive difference for our community.

Marianne: Some of the changes are already happening in a way that was mightily resisted for a long time. The move away from a residential three year requirement, huge in terms of opening access for people who could not possibly do that and still be considered a candidate for ministry in the priesthood. I would say that that was huge, opening up portals of accessibility and information that are not a one track for people in the Master's in Divinity process.

I would say, the model of priest as the wisest person in the community, in all the different areas that we are exposed to in seminary may be worth relooking at, in terms of what are the skills and attributes that are most needed? Again, part of the struggle is you don't know the context in which people are going to work, maybe different tracks for different things. Overall, I would say flexibility. Practicality can't be over emphasized. This is a working person's degree. Academics is not the pr— Unless people are going into academia to be proficient in the academics of seminary, are not the best indicators for what will make a successful parish priest and how to pivot in such a way that we can equip people.

We need to ground them in the tradition. I'm not dismissing Biblical Studies, theology, church history, none of that, but with an eye toward apologetics evangelism, church planting, church transformation. If that's not core to the curriculum, they're going to have to learn it elsewhere. I can't imagine I'm alone saying to seminaries, we need a little bit more emphasis, that is, a lot more emphasis on helping people be prepared for what's waiting for them when they get out.

Kyle: Leaning into that professional school orientation.

Marianne: That would be more bias, but again, I love seminary. Most of the seminarians I know who get to have that education love it. The community, all of that is precious. I'm not diminishing that for a moment. I'm not. I just want it to be something that can translate into the kind of hardiness that people need in a time when most congregations are— even the healthiest ones are always going to be needing people on the edge of the trends, of the social change theory. They're always going to have to know how to help lead people through change.

Kyle: In closing, we want to open the floor up for any other advice you would share with a seminary that's contemplating its future mission and more. What else is on your radar that should be on our radar and what would you send us off with?

Marianne: What's on my radar is a lot of uncertainty. I would say humility and deep curiosity about what God is doing, what's happening in the world and knowing that maybe half of what I've said, if I'm lucky, will be still pertinent a year from now. When I think there are some things that are tried and true and tested, the ancient practices, the core spirituality that we've been given, the gospel of Jesus, all those things are the solid rock. The way they live it out, the gap between us and those who are not in our circles of church however we define them, is huge. Because we're in our circle, we don't always see it.

Kyle, one more thought that just occurred to me as we were talking just now and that is, have you heard of those people that volunteer to be a secret shopper in a church? Have you heard of those people?

Kyle: The folks who go around and review services?

Marianne: Yes, like basically sat, I will just from the minute I step into-- get out of my car in your parking lot or walk into your building, I will just take note of my experience as a complete newcomer. As someone who is not at all versed in your church, its traditions, its practices and I will just give you some summary of my experience.

My question to you is, I wonder what equivalent of that would be for theological education. What would give a leader of the seminary the equivalent feedback. The interesting thing is what we think we're offering and what people experience, may be two completely different things.

Kyle: That's really helpful. Bishop Budde, thank you so much for being with us and sharing your perspective on this important question.

Marianne: All the best to you and I look forward to reading the article. I can only imagine these conversations are really interesting and go off in a lot of different directions so it would be a big great read.

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 more about the only Episcopal seminary on the west coast and subscribe to Crossings Magazine at cdsp.edu

