



**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:** This is Kyle Oliver, Communications and Marketing Manager at Church Divinity School of the Pacific. I'm here with the Right Reverend Jennifer Reddall of the Diocese of Arizona. Bishop Raddall, thanks so much for being with us.

**Bishop Reddall:** Thank you for having me. It's great to be with you.

**Kyle:** This is a conversation about the future of leadership formation in the context of the Episcopal Church seminaries, et cetera. You are a relatively new bishop, so I invite you to answer this question however it makes sense for you, but in your current position, or in a past position, I'm curious about how your thinking about leadership formation might have changed over the years.

**Bishop Reddall:** I think the way that it's changed, certainly, in the last two years is a much greater appreciation for the diversity of leadership that's needed across the church or across a diocese like Arizona. I had not spent a lot of time, before coming to Arizona, thinking about, how do we form part-time locally-formed clergy for work in rural parishes?

We have done quite a bit of that in Arizona, prior to my arrival. I'm getting to, as a bishop, see some of the fruits of that and also think about how we're going to do the next iteration of that in some of our congregations. Then the other thing that has come back that I think I was only slightly aware of as a parish priest is about, how do we form clergy to have the ability to be self-reflective and to have the gift of looking like how Jesus goes away to a mountaintop to pray or, to go away and reflect on our interactions in our ministry and honestly think about things done and left undone?

Those are the moments where I think, whenever there's conflict, the clergy need to be able to think about not just how I have been sinned against, but how do I work with this relationship? What am I doing that I can change? That's something that I'm not quite sure what the way of teaching that is, but I would love to see more of that.

**Kyle:** In saying that, do I hear you saying there's the critical awareness piece of being able to step outside of ourselves enough to understand the interactions, et cetera? I think I also hear you saying maybe there's a humility piece there of, "It's not my position as a leader to always be right and that there's something I have to, as part of my practice, be owning about the mistakes that I make and normalizing that." Am I hearing that right?

**Bishop Reddall:** I think you're hearing that right. Also, the Episcopal Church, I think, has consciously moved away from the Father Knows Best model, but only so far. Father Knows Best but we wouldn't say that anymore but it is often that the priest is the expert. There are things in which we are expert. I don't in any way want to denigrate the knowledge and training that clergy bring, but I also think part of that gift of humility, as you said, is the ability to take that deep breath and, "Okay, what would I have to change for us to move forward?" not just what does the system need to change or what does the other person need to change?

**Kyle:** You mentioned local formation, which CDSP is now involved with priests significantly through partnerships with lots of dioceses. It's something we think about as an institution. You said there's been a past iteration of local formation, and you're looking to the next iteration, wondering maybe about changes. I'm curious what your thinking there has been, so far.

**Bishop Reddall:** I've just ordained three of the four priests that were part of what was known as our Tentmaker Program here in Arizona, and I'm ordaining the fourth one in December, who are all raised up by their congregations, formed in an over two-year process online classes, and are in some places where they are three or four hours from Phoenix, all of them, and in different directions.

I think we've done a really good job of raising up those leaders and of training them and giving them the skills they need to get started. I don't think we did as good of a job preparing the congregations for what it was like. I'm wondering in another iteration, is it partly the theological formation of the priests to be, and is it part the theological formation of the congregation who is going to have a priest in a new relationship? Things like that, how do you educate both groups?

**Kyle:** For example, what does it mean to maybe to have, as a priest in charge or whatever, a person who isn't with us full-time? Is that the case?

**Bishop Reddall:** No, I think it's more, what is it like, as a rural congregation, to have a priest who is going to be here for a while, who isn't just some retired part-timer who's going to be there for a year or maybe two if you're lucky? Instead of having clergy leadership that consistently turns over because it's always somebody doing it out of love

but also it's not a long-term answer, whereas locally-forming clergy means that it is a long-term answer.

I was so grateful for the Tentmaker Priest Program, which was started before I got here and came to fruition just as I arrived. That is going to be a really radical shift for those congregations that are having clergy who they can count on to be there, which is a different relationship than I think any of those congregations have had with their clergy over the last 10 or 15, maybe even longer, years.

**Kyle:** Wow, what a change in the leadership model. Why don't we talk a bit about some other kinds of stories? We've been wondering about stories from new leaders, however that makes sense in your context, seminarians, recent graduates, folks in this program, and anyone that you think of as a new leader in your context, what are some stories that you're hearing that make you hopeful for the future of the church?

**Bishop Reddall:** The story that came to mind when I heard that question is one of actually a current CDSP seminarian who's doing distance learning, Perry Polly. He's a transitional deacon who I just ordained to the transitional diaconate in July, the end of July. He had done a year of field education at a congregation here in Arizona, St. Christopher's in Sun City.

It's a really interesting, great congregation. It's in Sun City, but it has a Spanish language service and an English language service and a really great mentor for him, Father Peter Fabre. He spent the year there, getting to know them, loving them, and then tragically, Father Peter died in August. There was a couple of weeks preparing for it with an illness, but very sudden to the congregation, very sudden to us, very sudden to Perry.

That left him as a seminarian at St. Peter's very much in a position of he was the person people turn to. There are some wonderful retired clergy on staff who are supporting the congregation as well, but to watch Perry display the gift of love and pastoral support with Father Peter, with his wife, over Zoom with the congregation, and to work with him on how we're going to liturgically and pastorally care for this congregation has really reminded me that as long as you have the heart of a pastor, it's good to learn all the skills but that if you love people, it will be church. It will be the gathering of the people of God, watching him interact with that congregation where it would have been perfectly reasonable for him to be like, "I'm a seminarian. I'm out."

**Kyle:** "Lots of other churches out there."

**Bishop Reddall:** Yes, "Somebody, get the grownup priest in here," but no he has just—we've put some boundaries around it to keep it appropriate and safe and everything—but that congregation has demonstrated to him what it is to be loved by a congregation, and he has demonstrated to the congregation what it is to show love for people.

**Kyle:** Thank you for that. That's beautiful. This next question, I want to invite you to really think big.

**Bishop Reddall:** Oh, I did.

**Kyle:** Good. This is the sort of imaginative question and a question thinking about maybe helping us think outside of the box of what seminary education might look like. I want to invite you to pitch a course that you would commission or maybe team-teach any instructor, any topic, what would it be?

**Bishop Reddall:** In my fantasy world, what came to me when I was thinking about this was I would love to team-teach a course with Tina Fey, who is a Lutheran and lives in New York City.

**Kyle:** Oh, really?

**Bishop Reddall:** Yes. I know what church she at least used to go to in New York City. She's an ELCA Lutheran. We're called to a common mission with them. I would team-teach a course with Tina Fey called, 'and Sarah laughed, holding onto humor as a woman in the church.' When I moved from being an associate rector to being a priest in charge of a congregation, it was right when *Bossypants* came out, which was her book about describing her experience of being a woman and a leader in comedy, a very male-dominated field, not a field that is necessarily open to change.

I found it a really helpful book for me, as I moved into a new leadership role. I think that the hanging onto laughter, whether it's the laughter of Sarah, where it's laughter at "God, you couldn't possibly be calling me to this," or whether it's the laughter of— I remember being in the church office as a rector with the two wardens waiting for the bedbug sniffing dog to arrive at 10:00 PM on a weeknight or something.

There was nothing to do in that situation but just laugh at the absurdity of ministry. I think holding onto humor and laughter is a way of holding onto joy. I think that's something that Tina Fey has certainly experienced in her life and her vocation, and that there would be something to learn from that for us because ministry is hard and taxing, and we need to find the places where we can just be joyful and laugh and cry.

That was one of the comments that— When my spouse was on the faculty at General Seminary, I was on the rota to celebrate the Eucharist in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd as a faculty spouse. One of the things that a seminarian at the time commented on was, "you always smile when you celebrate the Eucharist." My response was because I believe it because it's good news when I'm at the altar and saying, "Do this in memory of me," there is a joy that's palpable at that that I think comes through and that we shouldn't put under a bushel basket, claiming the laughter and the joy and the relief that comes with our sure and certain hope in Jesus.

**Kyle:** Yes, not just as self-care but actually as part and parcel of the proclamation.

**Bishop Reddall:** Yes. The part that got to me since I've been ordaining new priests and because I was ordaining new priests while I was not celebrating the Eucharist because none of our churches could gather for Eucharist during COVID. I've had a really unusual

experience of ordaining priests and then having them celebrate their first mass while I back off and stand and watch them.

I've gotten to see three first Eucharists from new priests, which has really actually, in some level, been a really wonderful privilege because the bishop doesn't usually get to see that. Here, you get to see them at the altar and it made me remember my first Eucharist. It was Prayer B, in the fullness of time, put all things in subjection under your Christ.

I'd heard Prayer B eight million times before, but it just hit me that I believe this. In that moment, I dissolved into a puddle of tears. Whatever emotion it is that we have at the words of the liturgy is genuine and is a way of interacting with the text and proclaiming it, that whether it's with laughter, whether it's with tears, that is it's real. It's not just a static, frozen text. It means different things to different people in different times, yet we proclaim it again and again and again.

**Kyle:** Thank you for that. That's a helpful exposition of not just the role of joy but the role of our whole human selves in relation. Thank you.

I'm curious if you could, as another bishop said, magic wand, make a change in how our leaders are trained that would make a positive difference for the Episcopal church, what would that change be?

**Bishop Reddall:** This is another one where, as a newish Bishop, I feel like I'm going to know a lot more about the answer to that question when I've seen the difference in how people have been formed and what happens to them as clergy or as lay-leaders. The thing that came to mind based on my experience so far, at least in the Diocese of Arizona, which is different from other dioceses—we're all unique—is I feel like I like what our new seminary graduates are bringing to the church.

I also think we might be preparing them to lead a church that doesn't exist yet. Our seminary graduates are dynamic and excited and ready to preach the gospel of love to the congregations. Then they're sent to congregations that have big political divides. They're sent to congregations that are not racially diverse. They're sent to congregations that are not necessarily, I think, the congregation that they were wanting to lead.

For me, the question, how do we prepare the church for the leaders that we're raising up? I'm not sure that it's, for me, at least at this point, so much of a change of what I'd like to see our leaders formed as. I think they're pretty excellent. We have a couple of recent seminary graduates from a couple of different seminaries, and they're able to think theologically.

They're grounded in the Bible. They're grounded in prayer. That's what I would want, but the church isn't always ready for them. If there's a way to figure out, how do we form leaders not just to serve in a changing church but to change the church and to function in multiple contexts. When I went to seminary, I wanted to work in an urban church

probably racially diverse, probably not wealthy, and I got sent out to the wealthy suburbs of LA.

I didn't want to go there. I learned so much. How do we equip people to have flexibility in where they can serve so that they can serve in a lot of different contexts, even if it's not the context that they have imagined God calling them to for all these years?

**Kyle:** There's a piece about the flexibility of context. Did I also hear you say, maybe the skills to help usher in that change?

**Bishop Reddall:** Yes. In Arizona, other than our Latino congregations, our congregations tend to be older, tend to be quite white. That's not universal, but that's a generalization. Our seminarians have to be able to function in that context because that's what the church looks like. They have to learn in this context. How do we broaden and diversify the church so that the church can include younger people in many places, include people of color so that the church, by the time they leave that congregation, it looks a little different?

**Kyle:** Thanks. Finally, we just want to ask for a piece of advice. What advice would you share with a seminary that is at crossroads and is contemplating its future mission and role?

**Bishop Reddall:** I will say that I've enjoyed watching a little bit from the outside over the last year to see the changes at CDSP, and I'm feeling very hopeful about your future as a seminary. I think that in the role of bishop, now the focus on tuition and student debt is very welcome, that I don't feel comfortable as a bishop, at this point, sending young people to a graduate theological institute where they're going to end up hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt so that they can go get a job in the church, hopefully.

I think the way that seminaries are shifting in their models for charging tuition, and providing housing and things are critical. That is the piece that I think is the most— I hate to focus on the financial and not the theological but—

**Kyle:** They're linked, right?

**Bishop Reddall:** Yes. It sounds like you're just talking about money, but what you're talking about is the stewardship of someone's life, that if you're going to hang a millstone around their neck when they're 25, then the church would have to have a much greater commitment to employment and salaries, and we don't currently have that. I think that the model that CDSP and some other places are using now gives me comfort in knowing that a person is being formed but that they have some flexibility still in their lives.

**Kyle:** Well, Bishop Reddall, it's been a real pleasure to speak with you today. Thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and your ministry with us.

**Bishop Reddall:** It's good to talk to you.

**Kyle:** Likewise, take care.

**Bishop Reddall:** Thanks.

**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](http://cdsp.edu)