



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: This is Kyle Oliver, communications and marketing manager at Church Divinity School Of The Pacific and I'm here with the Right Reverend Carlye Hughes of the diocese of Newark, Bishop Hughes. Thanks so much for being with us.

Bishop Carly Hughes: Glad to join you.

Kyle: This is a conversation about leadership formation in the church. We wanted to start by asking a question about in the time that you've been in your current position as the Bishop of Newark. How has your thinking about leadership formation maybe changed over that time?

Bishop Hughes: I don't know that it's really changed and part of that is where I am in my episcopacy. I've been the Bishop of Newark for about two years, which means I know enough to be dangerous and I still don't know what I don't know. I'm discovering as I go along the things that I think are important to me. I discovered probably last week that Episcopal seminaries are incredibly important to me, so much so that I said to an executive assistant, "If someone calls from an Episcopal seminary, you need to put them through directly to me."

Kyle: Wow.

Bishop Hughes: Their mission is important to the church and to what we're trying to accomplish. That was kind of new for me and her.

[laughter]

It hadn't solidified in my mind. Very much is I'm working with new priests and working through the ordination process, which I did not close when I entered the diocese. We needed priests too much. The thing that has come to me in these two years and with

the new people, the newly ordained that I've dealt with in this amount of time is what is most helpful is when people enter with a posture of being willing to learn and willing to try things, and what is not helpful is when people enter into ordain ministry thinking or fixed that they have to know all of the answers.

Not only that they have to know all of the answers, they are certain that they know all of the answers. With a certainty that you had when you were 14 or 15, if I could ever be that certain again, I would love it, but that's not how it works. In the current environment that we're in is so topsy turvy and changing so quickly and every week gets challenging in ways that we weren't expecting more prepared for the week before.

We really are figuring it out as we go. I can remember someone saying to me in a parish years ago, what do you mean figure it out? I'm like, figure it out. Once we have more information, we'll start making decisions and they're like, you can't run a business like that. I said, "No, no, no, everybody's running a business like that right now." That was five years ago. In this environment that we're in right now, I just-- I don't know how you walk into anything with certainty. You just have to be willing to work with what you have, learn what you don't know, try things, see what works.

I think if people can start in that place-- and that's not how we train leaders. We don't train leaders and say, "Hey, a good leader walks in not knowing what they're going to do on day one." I remember someone being very helpful when I was packing to leave here and they sent me a 90-day book saying, "Here's something you can use for your first 90 days as Bishop." I thought, "Oh yes, I'm sure it's going to work like that."

[laughter]

They too, "Let me look and see what it says", so anyway.

Kyle: Do you think there's a spiritual component to that orientation that you're describing?

Bishop Hughes: Yes, absolutely, that's probably the other piece of it that I've just been noticing across the board. I talk with clergy routinely about working their spiritual lives. I've certainly talk about it with laity, but the conversation with clergy is different. Naively, I just expected that everybody followed the rules and they said, "When we got to seminary, my Bishop said, you must go to chapel every day and you must have a spiritual director." I'm like, "Yes, sir Bishop." [laughs] I did it. I deal with people who never went to chapel on a routine basis and who try the spiritual director, the first one didn't work and haven't done it since.

Maybe some people are just infinitely good at being aware of what God's spirit is trying to do, the direction that we're headed in, but I find-- I'm a pretty average person, and most average people actually need community and they need support and they need someone wise or experienced that a spiritual friend, guide, community, somebody that can help anchor you in that.

Well, at any point in ministry, but particularly in the entry point, if you're going to go in and immediately have to deal with volatility and uncertainty, gosh, if you know you can count on the fact that you are called, you're doing what God asked you to do, then there's a good chance that God's going to give you what you need to get done what you need to do. It takes working that part of your life, which is not always a given. Sometimes people need encouragement.

Kyle: Thank you. I want to pivot now a little to maybe a story or two. I'm curious, in the new leaders that you're meeting and working within your context, maybe that's seminarians or recent grads or people new to the diocese, however, you want to kind of approach it. I'm curious about stories from new leadership that are making you hopeful for the future of this church.

Bishop Hughes: The fact that they're there makes me hopeful, number one. We've been putting out these messages about the death of Christendom so effectively over the last 15 years. I mean, that's when you talk about the church, that's what we do because part of it is we're so freaked out about decline and freaked out about decline, and what are we going to do with all of our churches that are sitting empty?

The interesting thing is, it seems as if someone forgot to tell God not to call anybody and forgot to tell those who feel called to go. That keeps happening in-- they come in wherever they're coming from in, whatever age they're coming in, they're coming in with the sensibilities and a sense of the needs of groups of people who have not been in the church for a while, and any of us who have been in the church for a while, if we'd been serving for a while, et cetera, as much as we want to reach that group, we're surrounded by church people. We genuinely are.

That is a heartening thing to me. First of all, just their presence, but also their very real connection to something that is beyond professional church world. There's a gift to that and a cheekiness to that that I like. I mean, I just love the way people will just bring things up and it doesn't cross their mind. I get aggravated when someone tries to reign them in because they're afraid it's going to upset the Bishop. I'm like, trust me if I'm upset, I'm going to let people know.

[laughter]

You don't have to work that out of them. There's enough in life, that's going to work that out of them but right now that kind of unbridled, enthusiasm, and creativity. I think that that's a gift to the church. Because again, we're figuring it out as we go. For people to just keep coming up with things, that's really important to us. Especially right now, to have someone brand spanking new, like young and very new here. Three weeks into pandemic and this person saying "Bishop, I just don't think we have done enough thinking about formation", I'm like "I know. We haven't."

[chuckles]

Roomful of experienced priests all think of the same thing, none of us can get to it but it's the kid that brings it up. It's also the kid that formed the committee, that started doing the work that has continued to grow over the last six months, and that I

now hand things off to and say, "Here's this little thing that I think if you could shepherd this it might turn into a thing for us." Those will help the diocese.

Kyle: That committee is thinking about formation broadly?

Bishop Hughes: Adult formation, yes.

Kyle: Adult formation. Got it. During COVID specifically?

Bishop Hughes: Right, during this. How do we do that when you're not in classrooms. You all are asking that same question. [laughs]

Kyle: Are there other things they've come up with that have been particularly interesting to you?

Bishop Hughes: Something's that caught my attention right away is, they're specifically looking at adults, but what started happening was a pressing need in terms of children in getting away from Zoom, so they moved to just some online storytelling. That's kind of happening at different churches all over the diocese.

Kyle: Well, thank you for that. I want to invite you in this next question to think big. Sky's the limit here. We're wondering if you could commission, or maybe team teach, I don't know how you want to think about this, but if you could commission some kind of special topics course or something at a seminary, and you could have any instructor teaching any topic, what would you like to invite that person to teach and who would they be?

Bishop Hughes: I would love to have somebody like Bobby McFerrin or Yo-Yo Ma sit with a group of students and talk about how you get people to coalesce, how do you get people to build into a team, move in the same direction at the same time, making the same sound that is moving to the whole wide world that listens to it, but there's no competition. Everybody knows that their piece and their part is really important. I think that those two in particular because I've watched them in all kinds of strange settings working with all sorts of other groups.

Bobby McFerrin in particular so often, it's just him. There's no big team. Next thing you know, the whole audience is making the music with him. This peace of working together, I think we have this tendency to think that that's a gift, like the natural-born leaders and their natural-born team builders, and some people just have high emotional intelligence and can work with the room and get people to do things. I'm not so certain of that because, hello, NFL, NBA, Major League Baseball, every professional orchestra.

There are teams all over the place that work together. That would be a very interesting thing, I'm not a big sports person, but to have a sports coach talk about and work with people and actually do it. Go to a court or a field, in a plane, let them walk through, work through how to get it in your body what it feels like to be in a team because the one thing I think that gets us thrown off in seminary is you are in your own little room typing up your own little thing, and you have this weird little

sense of competition with yourself. I had no interest in being an academic at all. That's just not my world or my thing.

I have great respect, God bless every single one of them, and especially bless their patience with dealing with me in the classroom. [laughs] They were gracious and good to me. I didn't deserve it. I felt that pressure. I must get better on the next one. Where did the drivenness thing come? There's a part of me that wonders why was so much of that single solitary focus-- Yes, you got to do it for preaching, but that's about it. Everything else in the parish is about dealing with people. In particular, if a parish is going to thrive, it's putting together teams and getting those teams to work well.

Kyle: Yes, yes. I like this Vision. We've got we got musical team leadership, we've got sports team leadership. You can almost imagine a week-by-week different kind of teams.

Bishop Hughes: Oh, my gosh, yes. Chefs? Put them in a kitchen and give them a big meal that has to be made and everybody's got their part in getting that meal made, and it has to be timed in a certain way so that it all lands on the plate ready to go at the same time.

Kyle: We need to pitch this thing to masterclass. Yes, because there's a cross-disciplinary view of leadership.

Bishop Hughes: I would come to that class. [laughs]

Kyle: Yes, me too. Me too. [laughs]

We didn't want to start with this question because it has the potential to set a tone that may or may not be helpful, but we do want to talk about changes that might be important in seminary settings and maybe you've nodded to some of this already. We're curious if there was one change you could make in terms of how we form leaders in the Episcopal Church, in seminaries, or other structures. What change would you make?

Bishop Hughes: It would definitely be-- At one point, I don't know if they still have it, the wisdom year. Gap year for everybody.

Kyle: Like the Lutherans.

Bishop Hughes: Two years in the classroom and a year out, and then come back, so it's a four-year program. That's where everybody just goes "You have lost your mind." [laughs] I understand it because it's more money et cetera, but I think to give people a chance to integrate some of the stuff that they've had, and then come back in and do more study and have a real sense of, "Here are the things that I really wish I could spend more time in." Yes, you can get to it with continuing education but I'm sorry, it's a different animal. It really and truly is a very different animal in seminary.

It's widely, incredibly impractical, but I find that right now, I'm having to put almost every seminarian on a four-year plan anyway because people have kids and all

kinds of stuff going on. Even the really young ones are needing a fourth year. I know it's not practical for everybody, but, gosh, I think it could be a powerful thing. It would take some real managing because I wouldn't want to just say "Go fly." There are things you need to accomplish. There needs to be some specific feedback points in there, so people are building a sense of, "Here are real gaps in my education I want to address, and here's some real passion I didn't even know I had."

Kyle: Yes, and "I discovered it in the midst of this really immersive year. I might not have discovered it in 12-hour-a-week field ed or eight-hour-a-week field ed or what have you.

Bishop Hughes: And to not have the pressure of, "I'm ordained so I must have it right." You know what? If you're an intern, no, you don't. [laughs]

Kyle: That's so helpful. Maybe for a future series, we'll talk to our Lutheran colleagues and the GTU because I think that's their model.

Bishop Hughes: That is their model. Yes.

Kyle: Is there final advice that you would want to share with a seminary that is contemplating its future mission and role?

Bishop Hughes: Yes, that's where I feel woefully inadequate. Mostly, I just want to-- I would offer encouragement to say that your ministry is so needed. The challenge of church right now is, it has become more complicated every five years. It just gets more and more complex. I don't expect a seminary to form every little thing. I don't expect seminaries to be teaching about roofs or how did you payroll? I think you get that in a practicum someplace.

If people actually really know the Bible, if they have not only the ability to name their own theology but important theologies in our tradition and the important theologies floating around in the world. We've got to know if we don't understand that there are people who really believe that we were put on this earth to use everything in it. It's not just that they're ignoring creation, they think that's their theology. It's like, you got to understand who you're tussling with.

To do that work right now, when everybody's saying find a new way to do it, maybe I'm a dinosaur, I'm probably the wrong person to listen to because I believe in what the seminaries are doing and I know you have to change and innovate and deal with what's happening out here, but I think all of us are innovating in terms of video land. "Gosh, have we learned a whole world what vestry is ever going to meet every single time face to face?" At least half of those are going to be online. We've learned a lot. Some of that innovation is going to come in. I trust that there are far more experienced minds than mine that will have good advice that way. I just have to say thank you and please keep it up. [laughs]

Kyle: Well, I appreciate that reminder that this curriculum broadly speaking, not CDSP specifically, but these traditions of how we form leaders for the church are in many ways quite ancient and have developed over a lot of time and with a lot of thought and have seen them a lot of folks through a lot of challenges. I appreciate

that reminder. Well, Bishop Hughes, thank you so much for being with us. We really appreciate your time and your perspective, and this has been great. Thank you.

Bishop Hughes: You're welcome. Thanks for letting me be a part of this. I appreciate it.

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