



**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. I'm here with the Right Reverend Diane Bruce, Bishop suffragan of the Diocese of Los Angeles. Bishop Bruce, thanks so much for being with us.

**Bishop Diane Bruce:** It's so good to be here.

**Kyle:** This is a conversation about leadership formation and the future of leadership formation in the Episcopal church. For starters, we're curious as a Bishop, how has your thinking about leadership formation perhaps changed in the time that you've been serving in your position?

**Bishop Bruce:** Well, I think especially given the last couple of years and the swiftly changing demographics that we're all going through, at least on the coasts. I'm seeing that, in terms of formation, the best-formed clergy that I've seen are ones that are very comfortable in a multicultural setting.

It's not about having somebody being able to say the mass in Spanish. It's not that, it's about really understanding culturally where people are and being able to bridge and build within that context. You can have multiple cultures within one congregation, but you've got to be able to bridge and have a common language and be able to translate not necessarily from one language to another, but from one on one way of understanding to another where people are.

I'm seeing that from some of the seminaries that I've seen most recently, the ones that are most successful for the lack of a better term are ones that can bridge those gaps. What I see is that we really need to start forming leaders to be able to bridge those gaps because these gaps are going to continue to become more and more of a part of who we are and who we engage with within our community context.

**Kyle:** Are there particular practices of that like intercultural being, intercultural leadership, that you've seen be particularly effective? I'm curious if we could just drill down a little more on that and like. How do you know that when you see it in a new leader?

**Bishop Bruce:** Usually, it's somebody that's willing to really listen. I mean really listen, not just have to have the answer right away. Somebody that can listen and be there and stand in and understand sometimes that silence is okay, right? Because for some cultures being silent is communicating. Being able to read that and not just kind of jump in and try to solve it, solve whatever, or deal with whatever.

Also, we've done something here called Asian immersion experience, especially Asian immersion experiences. We've had a series of them for the various Asian communities that we have living in the Diocese of Los Angeles, just to make clergy and lay leaders who are finding the demographic around their churches shifting to be able to understand culturally what might be sensitive or not sensitive for someone, and culturally how to communicate in a clearer manner.

Anyway, those have been pretty successful and they've been fun to do because they always involve food, you see. Anyway, which actually, food is the great equalizer, right? If you want to really get to know somebody, you share a meal, and then you have them talk about what their favorite foods are, and then you really start to understand, I think, at a deeper level.

Also, I've been talking about for a while having a cultural competency requirement for people to be almost, I hate to use the term certified, but to really be able to engage in that work and become the beloved community. Right? I think part of this, Kyle, is really inviting the church into an expanded understanding of what beloved community is. I get all excited when I think about that.

Because I'm the Bishop in charge of what we call the new community or what we used to call multicultural ministry. I think it's my favorite thing because it's just, it's amazing. It's about dealing with issues between cultures, but I think a well-trained clergy person or well-trained lay-person can help build those bridges so that we can really be together as a beloved community.

**Kyle:** Yes, very cool. I'm wondering just because I was so intrigued, can you tell us a little more about like what-- You mentioned the Asian-American immersion days, maybe I've got the title slightly wrong, but what does an event like that look like? You mentioned food. What else happens in one of those experiences?

**Bishop Bruce:** Well we've done a part A and a part B so far, for Chinese, Korean, and Filipino. What we've done is to bring people together to talk about immigration history, talk about culture, to talk about language, to talk about the fact that just because someone is Chinese does not mean they speak the same dialect as the person sitting next to them.

Just because they speak the same dialect does not mean politically or culturally they're coming from the same place. Just that kind of awareness, and then talking about music, other forms of culture, and some of the driving forces within those

communities in terms of how they see the world to try to help people understand why someone might react a certain way.

It's been fascinating to see how people respond. At one point, there was a very heated conversation between two of our presenters in the Chinese portion because one was from Taiwan, one was from mainland China, and one started talking about the sovereignty of Taiwan and that just raised the hackles of the other one, and these two people are friends.

They're friends. They get along, but the people that were sitting there watching this got to see that just because you're speaking the same language does not mean you're on the same page. That was actually a really good one because it was like the ultimate example of how things can go wrong quick. Then I stepped in and we calmed the situation down and I got a chance to explain what was going on.

The other one, I think that was really wonderful was a conversation within the Filipino community about the fact that there are different Filipinos. We have indigenous Filipinos within the Philippines and within this country that the culture, the language, things are different. We were able to talk about that and experience a little bit of that. Then in the Korean community, we were able to have a really strong conversation about the Korean notion of Han. Which really undergirds a lot of Korean thought, Korean action, Korean ways of being.

In doing those things, we were able to impart to people whose churches whose demographic is changing around them a sense of who might be there. A big problem that happens is that if somebody is Asian and they come to the door of a church, I have heard on more than one occasion, clergy say something like, "Hi, where are you from?" The person will say Omaha. Then the clergy person will say, "No, where are you from?" Right? Or, "Oh, wow. You speak English really well." "Well, I was born here." It's being sensitive to that dynamic that we really need to, I think, instill, especially in our clergy to help them become the leaders of the church really needs them to be at this time.

**Kyle:** I'm curious for some stories from new leaders, however you want to define that. Maybe it's seminarians, maybe it's recent graduates, people new to the diocese. I'm just curious about stories of new leadership that have you feeling hopeful about the church?

**Bishop Bruce:** Yes. There's one particular new rector that we have in the diocese. He took a very complex, disjointed system and slowly through, relationship building and common sense and amazing planning, is shifting this whole mix of different ways of doing things under one church roof into consistent, relationship-based, open communication, transparent ways of being. He's done it in about a year.

**Kyle:** Wow.

**Bishop Bruce:** He still has work to do, but just the way he goes in and he listens, and he listens, and then he starts to talk. He builds the relationship, he listens, and then he can get people to journey with him going forward. I'm watching what's coming out of this. Groups within that congregation that would not necessarily talk to

each other, people are talking and interacting. They're actually doing things from a business perspective in a much more holistic way.

I'm excited to see what could happen or what's going to be happening there. That's probably my most exciting one, but it's all built on relationship building, deep listening, having a good understanding of systems, and working together to move everybody forward to the glory of God. From young parishioners to old parishioners, people are telling me that he's rocking it.

**Kyle:** Wow. That's a great story. Thank you.

**Bishop Bruce:** You're welcome.

**Kyle:** I want to invite you now to really think big. This is our imaginative outside the box question. We're curious about a new course, a needed course, a creative course, whatever direction you want to go with it. If someone asked you to either commission or, you know, invite, or co-teach some kind of special topics course with any instructor for today's seminarians, who would you invite to teach it and what would you call the course?

**Bishop Bruce:** That's so easy. Okay, I would invite Michael Bruce Coury to join me in a class entitled, Beloved Community, Let's do this. Because we have to do it, we have to do this work. Michael is so clear and so fun, and he can go deep. This is the reason I love him. He can go very, very deep, but he never makes you feel like you're drowning.

I think we need to be able to present a vision of beloved community in a way that inspires all the leaders of this church, the new leaders of this church, the future leaders of this church, that we can bring them along so that we can actually fulfill God's dream for the world so that we can be truly the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement welcoming everyone. That would be my course.

**Kyle:** I'm hesitant to ask this as a follow-up question because I think if people listening to this haven't learned a bit about beloved community in the last few years that might be problematic, but let me ask it anyway. How would you describe beloved community and its incarnation in the Episcopal Church?

**Bishop Bruce:** What I'm talking about here is really almost a reconciliation-based way to build community. Part of it is on that, doing that deep listening, being culturally competent, multiculturally competent, but also about inviting people into the work of how to be together and how to care for each other even when you disagree.

I think disagreement is always going to be an issue for any church because we don't have two people to think the same way ever. But also about how do we communicate? How do we welcome? How do we engage? How do we invite? There's all kinds of aspects of this that we need to start to embrace as an Episcopal Church because with the way the changing demographics are going, for example, in the Diocese of Los Angeles, we very shortly will have 44% of our demographic-- Hold on. [chuckles]

**Kyle:** The binder's coming out.

**Bishop Bruce:** The binder's coming out. It's estimated that by 2023, less than 33% of the population making up the area of the Diocese of Los Angeles will be white. Most growth in the coming years will be in the Asian population. Hispanics, Latinos outnumber Whites today in the region 45% to 33%, yet we tend to only see our community as people that look like us, not understanding that our neighborhoods-- The beloved community is really what is reflected in our neighborhoods. That's what we have to build and work on.

Does that make sense? I say, beloved community because I'm thinking, "It's all part of that." When the ethnic missioners get together, when they all get together and bring everyone together, they refer to that gathering as new community. The new community gathering, right? We started talking about multicultural ministry as new community because historically when you talk about things like multicultural ministry, it's equated with outreach, which automatically makes it a second class citizen within the church.

**Kyle:** It's White normativity from the start.

**Bishop Bruce:** Right, exactly. That's why new community, beloved community, phrases like that opens this up, which is what we really, really need to do. The Episcopal Church needs to do this work.

**Kyle:** I'm curious. I always say we didn't want to lead with this question because it can have a way of shaping the whole conversation, but we do as a seminary and in the context of this article and this series, I want to be thinking about like, what changes need to be happening in how leaders are formed in the Episcopal Church? As one person said, "Oh, you mean if I could just wave a magic wand?" Yes, that's the idea here. If you could wave a wand and make one change to how we form leaders in the Episcopal Church, what would that be?

**Bishop Bruce:** I think I wouldn't have us so tied to answering the GOE questions correctly as really being formed to have an excitement around loving Jesus, following Jesus, and helping others to do the same. I would also say that if the seminary could do whatever it takes to help leaders learn to be nimble. Nimble is a term that's being used a lot right now.

I think when I look at how certain clergy from around the country have dealt with the pandemic, they've either embraced what's happening and made it work for them in their contexts, or they felt overwhelmed by it. The ones that have felt overwhelmed, and I've talked with a number of them, I think it's because they have no sense of how to be nimble.

They know how to do things the way they've always been done, but they can't pivot. They can't pivot.

Anything that can be done in terms of discernment committees to pick up on a candidate's willingness or ability to be flexible, to be nimble. Rigidity I think has to be

thrown out of the church. We do not have the luxury of being rigid. We do not have that luxury anymore.

**Kyle:** Embracing practices that invite people to be thinking about alternatives, to be trying out new ways of tackling old problems and new problems, that sort of thing?

**Bishop Bruce:** Right, and not being afraid to experiment. Of course, we stay within the guidelines of the candidates of the church, but not being afraid to experiment or to try something new. If it fails, it fails, you learn something. If it doesn't fail, hurray for you, you go on, and maybe you teach somebody else or share with somebody else what you've learned.

That's the other thing. For the seminary not to create clergy that think they have to live in a silo instead of being part of a community where when you succeed, or when I succeed, we all succeed, and to help each other do that because our contexts are all going to be different. Even churches in the same city, their contexts are different.

**Kyle:** Avoiding silos between congregations, between leaders, that sort of thing.

**Bishop Bruce:** Correct, correct.

**Kyle:** The collegiality and--

**Bishop Bruce:** Right. I think the thing about that is for the seminary to teach the seminarians to work collaboratively instead of, "This is my paper and this is--" You know, teaching people to work collaboratively because that's really-- Especially with the way that the church is changing through time, we need to be able to be more-- We need to be able to work more collegially in order to hold the strengths from the people around us and use those strengths for the greater good. Does that make sense?

**Kyle:** Yes. In closing, I just want to invite your further advice for a seminary that is contemplating its future mission and its future role. What that we haven't talked about or that you want to emphasize is on your radar that should be on our radar?

**Bishop Bruce:** Embrace Asia. Embrace Asia. I think that that is an opportunity for the seminary, not only to do potentially distance learning with some of the dioceses in Asia, but also to do exchanges, student exchange. There's lots of opportunity there because especially where the seminary is with the growing Asian population that's coming in, it would be a missed opportunity not to do this work together and partner with dioceses who would love to do that with CDSP.

**Kyle:** Bishop Bruce, thank you.

**Bishop Bruce:** You're welcome. You're welcome. Thank 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 more about the

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