



**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.

**Jeckonia:** This is Jay from Church Divinity School of the Pacific and I'm here with Michael Angel Molina, a third-year student at CDSP. Michael, welcome.

**Michael:** Thank you.

**Jeckonia:** Just share a bit about who you are, where you call home, and what has drawn you to CDSP.

**Michael:** I'm Michael Angel Molina, and this is my final year of seminary as a low-residence accelerated student at CDSP. I call Reading, Pennsylvania home and have for most of my life. I reside just out of the city to the north in the suburbs with my husband and our two dogs. I initially was looking for a way to get the education the theological training that I need to be not just a good priest, but the best priest that I can be. I really want to give my all to the church and my all to God.

I was looking for a way to do that that didn't involve me packing up everything and moving across the country. Especially in the first couple years when I was still serving in the military reserves moving would've been a little bit difficult. I found out about CDSP and found that they had a low-residence program that would let me study just by being there about a month out of year and doing the rest of my work online. It has really worked out wonderfully for me. I'm so blessed by not just everything that I've learned, but also by the collegiality and the community that I've experienced.

All my fellow seminarians and the professors, I love every one of them dearly and thank every single one of them for everything that they have taught me. Everything that we've learned along the way, I'm so grateful to all of them.

**Jeckonia:** What is one question you have encountered in the classroom that has sparked curiosity related to ministry and all your vocation?

**Michael:** I think that one of the most important questions I encountered was, how can we enhance preaching in the Episcopal Church? We don't always give preaching the consideration that it deserves and that's a shame as it's so important. Some folks go to Bible study during the week, but a lot of people, the only time they're going to have to delve into the scripture and learn about God is on a Sunday morning. We really have to have our preaching locked in.

Also, thinking about the fact that we are trying to reach out to Black and Brown people who will be the majority in this country in a couple of decades, and for them preaching holds even more importance. Especially in the Black community, any old person won't do. It has to be somebody who's going to speak truth to power in the word of God and in the name of God. We really have to up the game when it comes to preaching.

**Jeckonia:** Thank you. That leads me to my next question now, what is one event or one issue happening in the world that has impacted how you view ministry today?

**Michael:** I was just reading an article the other day that said that labor unions' support is at its highest level since 1965 in the United States. I think we need to really get involved as a church with the labor union movement. Jesus worked... We believe that God was incarnate and worked. He got splinters in his hands. Maybe he bumped his finger, maybe he stubbed his finger while he was working. It's a really profound thing to think about that Jesus worked. Moses also. If you think about it Moses was the first union leader. That's pretty much what he did. People were being subjected to unfair conditions and then he went in and negotiated. There's a lot in the Bible about labor and about the money that we're paid for our labor.

Yes, I want to get involved in the labor movement more so than I have been. I used to be a union worker myself. I know the importance of unions and I think that the Church needs to be right there with the people fighting for better pay and better benefits.

**Jeckonia:** How do we reconcile that with the call to cultivate spaces where and how we think leads to actions of coming together to mend the brokenness and isolation that we may feel so all can experience belovedness? What I'm hearing from you is meeting it head-on.

**Michael:** Yes, I think we need to look back to some of our leaders of the past, especially Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Besides doing the great work he did in the civil rights movement, he was also bringing the Church together with the labor movement. One of the last things that he did before he was assassinated was he was trying to organize the sanitation workers. I think if we look back to the Church's history and how we've been involved in the labor movement there's obviously some new factors that we have to consider. I think that looking back at our history, how we were involved in the labor movement can inform what we do in the future.

**Jeckonia:** What has been one creative or experimental ministry opportunity you have explored or encountered over the last year that has inspired you?

**Michael:** I think pop evensong at my parish. My parish came up with this idea a couple years ago to have a service where we have a local artist. We're so lucky to have a Grammy Award-winning artist who lives right here in the Reading area. We approached him and said, "What if we take secular music that has spiritual undertones, and what if we do that music in the context of evening prayer?" We forged out with this idea not knowing how it would go and it became a really big success.

After the rector retired, the responsibility fell on me to keep this program going so I played around with the liturgy a little bit. I used prayers from the New Zealand Prayer Book and other prayer books within the Anglican Communion. We tried different musical themes. For February, we did music from all Black artists. When the war in Ukraine broke out, we did music that was Ukrainian-themed. We've done different artists like the Beatles or Aretha Franklin. The great thing about this service is that people who would not otherwise come into the church came in because they enjoyed music.

They got to hear Grammy Award-winning artists performing this music. People who were estranged from the Church and also people who just didn't grow up in the Church or they don't think that Sunday morning service is something for them. They came to this service and it was a gateway for us to be able to introduce ourselves to them and get them into the regular Sunday services.

**Jeckonia:** Would you tell us where this idea came from, who came up with the idea, and just how you went about it?

**Michael:** Some of the parishioners here that came up with the idea. Some of whom have moved out of the area, but others who still belong to the parish. It was their idea to fuse pop music and evening prayer and I was just a custodian of this project of theirs. Since we didn't have a clergy person for a while. It was originally an evening mass, but it turned into an evensong because we didn't have a clergy person at the time. I just kept it going and played with it a little bit. Tried different things to see what worked and what didn't work.

Now as my time in the parish comes to an end as I move on to a new field placement, it falls on them to keep it going and to find new artists. Try new things as far as the music goes and the liturgy and see if it can continue to be a great tool to get people in the church doors.

**Jeckonia:** I'm also curious about what were the demographics like. I know you said you live in Readington, right? What were the demographics like? What people has this drawn into the congregation?

**Michael:** Reading, Pennsylvania it's a Rust Belt city 60 miles Northwest of Philadelphia and it's been struggling for a long time. We're on, I think the beginning of a Renaissance, but it's taking us a lot longer than cities like Lancaster and Easton have to turn things around. The interesting thing about Reading is that the city is 67% Hispanic.

We are one of the most heavily Hispanic cities in the United States, small cities anyway. We have to reconcile that with the fact that most of the people in the parish come from the suburbs. They drive in from the suburbs. They don't live in the city.

The evensong was the first service where we were really able to get people to come into the church who live within walking distance. That was everybody. That was white, Black, Hispanic, everybody. It was the first service where we really looked like the community. Now I think one of the ways that we have to innovate the service is to get different artists in here who reflect the musical tastes of the people who live here. I've been talking with some Hispanic artists and some Black artists and I'm hoping to pass that information along to the parish and get different artists in here.

Keep the artists that we do have, but also get different artists in here so that everybody's musical tastes are represented. I think when we do that, we'll be able to have a service that reaches the whole community and where people can just come off the streets, walk in the door and say, "Hey, this is really different and I like it," and use that as an opportunity to get them more regularly into the church.

**Jeckonia:** Where and how do you sense God calling you to leave into your vocation beyond your seminary experience?

**Michael:** All I know is that God is calling me to be a witness to His love, to tell people that God loves you that God is here. Whether you're having a good day or a bad day, whether you're struggling, whether you're rich or poor God loves you. I don't know where I'm going to do that. I don't know if it's going to be here in Pennsylvania or somewhere else. I don't know if it's going to be in a parish or in the hospital or prison.

**Jeckonia:** What is a final word of encouragement you have for the CDSP community?

**Michael:** Jeckonia, I don't know how your path to ordination has been, but mine has been a windy path. I lost two loved ones while I've been studying. I've gone through a bishop transition, I've gone through a priest transition, and so it's been a windy path. It's taken me a lot longer than I thought it would take. Also, that has allowed opportunities to come out that I never thought would present themselves. So I think my advice is to be patient. Know that it is going to take however long it takes and the journey is just as important as the destination.

Also, I think I would say just keep it cool. Keep a cool, level head. Some of the church people will challenge us, and I have experienced a lot of that, and I have learned how to keep a cool head and just find that peace surpasses all understanding no matter what the circumstance is.

**Jeckonia:** Michael, thanks so much for joining us on *Crossings Conversations*.

**Michael:** 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

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