



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.

Greg Klimovitz: This is Greg Klimovitz from Church Divinity School of the Pacific on contract with Learning Forte. I'm here with Michael Drell, a third-year student at CDSP. Michael, welcome.

Michael Drell: Thank you.

Greg: Michael, can you tell us a little bit about who you are.

Michael: I'm a postulant for holy orders. My home Parish is called St. Michael & All Angels in Cuernavaca, Mexico. It's La Iglesia Anglicana De México, which is part of the Anglican Communion. We were a direct mission of the Episcopal Church of the US until the '90s, and now it's the independent church within the Anglican Communion. I'm living here in Berkeley, with my partner, Chris, who is here at the moment and sometimes working overseas.

He works for *Médecins Sans Frontières*, so he's away part of the time and here part of the time. We're very blessed to have this apartment from CDSP, and enjoying Berkeley and seminary.

Greg: Beautiful. What drew you to CDSP to enroll as a student?

Michael: To be honest, I was studying already with the Theological Institute in Cuernavaca, and I had contacted CDSP and some other seminaries in the States. Then I was actually the victim of a home invasion and a kind of drawn-out situation of robbery, which was very stressful in the home where I was staying of a woman from our vestry, and they decided that they were going to help me get out of Mexico and go on pilgrimage, which I loved doing, and I hadn't had the opportunity to do the Via Frances to Santiago across the North of Spain.

This was a dream of mine. It was a therapeutic offer. While I was on Camino it really just came to me to get back in touch with Spencer Hatcher. I literally just wrote her an email. She got back to me and said that there was still space, and I could start in the spring term, but first I had to have an interview and do the application and all the stuff. I ended up doing that. That just went amazingly well. It just all felt right and the obvious choice.

Greg: You said that one of the things you're passionate about is helping folks bridge the eschatological hope that you have, especially as someone who professes to be a Christian, with the realities of a world that's deeply stressed and strained, and how to help folks bridge those two together so they can maybe even find a similar hope that you have. Can you tell us a little bit about that, about how you came to that discovery or that curiosity?

Michael: Yes. I'm someone that asks a lot of questions normally, in class or outside of class or to God and to myself and to everybody around that will listen and answer, but there's a larger, or maybe a more fundamental question for someone in my position as a postulant, which probably came about through theology class and the discussions with Professor MacDougall and with my classmates, and the question being, how does a priest, or how does anyone in a position of ministering offer the sense of eschatological hope that really is around fearlessness and trust of God, trust of the divine, and trust of one's path?

How do you offer that to others, especially if they aren't people of faith? Especially, I'm trying to work on, I wouldn't say figure out, but I'm trying to understand better how that is brought to others and offered to others beyond the verbal How does this eschatological hope and sinful world come together, not really just in time or just in understanding, but how do they interrelate all together?

Greg: You said something that I want to lean into a little bit because I haven't heard that phrase before so much, but you said the nonverbal responses or nonverbal offerings. I don't know if that's the way you phrased it. Can you tell us a little bit more about what you mean by that?

Michael: Well, maybe all religion as humans practice it relies on the written word and the verbal word. Obviously, Christ is the Word. Maybe more than what that means, as far as words, is how that is a sense of being in a salvific sense that can be transmitted in other ways. For me, the obvious would be the sacraments and Holy Communion and what goes into that is inexplicable, but all worship despite the fact that it's laden with words, what else is going on that's the real essence of it all?

Greg: What is one event and/or issue happening in the world that has impacted how you view ministry today?

Michael: I feel like the issue of suffering has been a long-running issue and a pertinent issue in every context of what people are experiencing in a very diverse world that we have right now I'm constantly reflecting on that, what does it mean to do ministry or to be a minister or to have a calling to the priesthood?

It was funny you talking about the Episcopalian side of things or whatever because the Anglican Communion is extremely diverse, and Anglican theology is extremely diverse. We have evangelical wings and Anglocatholic wings. There's a lot of times that I don't feel very Episcopalian in relation to what other Episcopalians might be saying. There are so many niches within the tradition that if you're thinking about it, you'll find your brethren in your home.

Greg: You've alluded to the fact that you're someone who is pretty well traveled, it sounds like. Can you tell us a little bit about how your travels around the world have particularly provoked your understanding and even more so your compassion and empathy related to human suffering?

Michael: Yes. It would've begun before I traveled anywhere beyond the city where I was born, which is Washington DC. I went to a hugely privileged education of private schools in DC. Most of my education, well, at least nine years was at a Quaker school. We had community service as a big part of our week. We had pedagogies designed and delivered in ways that were about citizenship and understanding what was going on for people that didn't live in our neighborhood or go to our school.

The school was conscientious in instilling social justice at the very least. Even we studied the history of Africa. Before I ever learned the 50 states and their capitals, we were studying the African countries and the history of colonialism and the history of empire. I don't know. It always seemed like racial justice, especially at Sidwell, was always just a huge topic that we were reflecting on and we were criticizing in the world or in our own community and just working with all the time.

Also, to have a Quaker meeting was a powerful form of school chapel. You are sitting in silence and are given equal opportunity to stand up and speak if you're so moved, an equal opportunity with the principal or the headmaster or any teacher or other adult or other students. There's something about the egalitarian stuff within Quakers. That I think is very powerful, especially when it doesn't become too individualistic, which it also does. I'm wary of a lot of the relationships between Quakerism and then capitalism since the 18th century and English mill towns. It was a close relationship.

Greg: I feel that. I really do. What has been one creative or maybe even experimental ministry opportunity that you've explored or encountered over the last year that has inspired you?

Michael: I started working at a foot clinic. I've started doing voluntary work with a podiatric nurse and a wound care nurse that have a clinic at St. John the Evangelist in the Mission in San Francisco. I think that, for me, has been huge because it's related to the path I felt like I was being called to, but I wasn't quite sure how that would work as far as healthcare and faith.

The concept of healing within Christianity is huge, and it's contentious still. What does it mean to need healing, or what does healing actually do? Is it the same as a cure? Then, what about care? Actually, physical action of care is really what love means. I

think, especially in English, we have a really limited and, I would say, restricting concept of love. We have this expectation of a personal emotional feeling that is "my love" that I can have for a "you." I feel like it's isolating and objectifying. I don't think that's what Jesus was talking about.

Greg: It's fascinating to me to hear about what you're talking about. I would love to if you could describe a little bit more about this podiatry ministry that you're a part of. What I would also love to hear is how that may relate to the questions you're asking about suffering.

It doesn't seem like it's disconnected, they seem deeply related.

Michael: Yes, totally. I would say that. A little bit more about it, this is a clinic that is run by two nurses who are both volunteers. They basically have a chair, which someone reclines on, and they have their tools that they use to care for people's feet, which could be as simple as cutting their toenails and advising them on more or less moisture being necessary for their foot.

There's all sorts of different problems that people have. These nurses are caring for these situations or conditions that are material, but I think for a lot of people to have their feet cared for is an unusual situation, and it's a powerful situation. It's comforting. Obviously, there's painful stuff going on sometimes, like sometimes something needs to be cut or removed or adjusted in ways that are painful, but in general, I think all the clients, because they keep coming back, find it soothing.

If we think of John 13:14 and the pedilavium, the foot-washing in the Gospel of John, it is the Eucharist in that gospel. I don't want to say anything heretical, but I think there are Eucharistic qualities that were very much intended. We have Holy Communion every day as a rite, and foot-washing is once a year, maybe, Maundy Thursday, as just like a symbolic ceremonial thing.

The more reading I do, the more contentious I realize it actually all is, and how uncomfortable it is for people. For me, at this moment in time, if I feel like people are uncomfortable, or feel confronted by something, that might actually be a sign that things are on the right track for their formation. It's hard to say, but I think as far as human suffering, our feet are the place where we make contact with the ground, ideally, although we often don't.

We spend our time in shoes and on concrete. I feel like it's really important for us to start at the ground, even with our, let's say, Christian education, what I was talking about earlier, as far as how to offer people a sense of hope or a sense of eschatological hope and salvation. We've mucked it up trying to do it from our heads. It's really clear to me from the example in the Gospel of John.

Jesus quite literally says, excuse my misquote, but it's like, "See what I just did? This is what I'm talking about. Do this. This is how you will follow me by doing this." I don't think it's actually such a metaphor. I think it's pretty clear.

Greg: Where do you sense God calling you to live into your vocation beyond your seminary experience?

Michael: I feel very strongly called to this seminary, and the seminary experience is very much part of this broader call to care, as love and as our actions embodying Christ's hands and feet, that it's just part of it, so I guess more clinics, more knowledge. I've thought about doing-- The nurses are trying to figure out, what's the most entry-level nursing or care or even beauty certificate that I could get to be able to do more hands-on?

I'll be honest. The first day I went to volunteer for them, I had such an amazing experience that I was watching them work and frustrated because I used to do similar work with horses' hooves, and it's very similar. I was watching them, and the tissues are the same, they're just smaller, so the tools are smaller. I was thinking, "Oh, gosh, maybe I should have gone to nursing school instead of seminary."

I was feeling really sad and frustrated that my role seemed so different than what they were doing. I'm not plugging social media, I hope, but I did open Facebook when I was on the train back to Berkeley. The first thing that came up was Pope Francis, not his Facebook page, but someone had posted a photograph of him dressed in the most civilian clothing I'd ever seen him but still with a collar.

He just looked like a regular priest, not a pope. He was working at free meals for people. All of the comments underneath were talking about how we need to see clerics doing more hands-on work. That just blew me away. It was like it really gave me a sense of relief that, no, I'm still very much on the right path for everything that I feel God is calling me to because, in as much as I can decipher God's call and discern the way, is that I would be a cleric doing more hands-on care stuff and that that is probably an important--

This isn't just about me. I think that those comments from those people, and they were people all over the world, I feel like this is maybe a bigger issue for the church, in general. In fact, I was talking to-- We just had our parish retreat, my fielded parish is All Soul's on Cedar Street. We were at the Bishop's Ranch for our parish retreat. I work with the youth group every week.

Part of my responsibilities at the retreat were with the youth, facilitating conversations. And we had a passage from Isaiah-- Oh, no, sorry. This was a passage from Jeremiah, talking about, basically, God was going to put something in your mind and write it on your heart, and with the youth talking about, "What's going on with mind and heart, and how do we connect them?" the typical thing.

Then one young man said, "Oh, what about gut and gut feeling?" and I was just like, "Yes, keep going," and then this young woman said, "and even the feet," and I was just blown away because I couldn't have asked for a better comment as far as what my own interests are in ministry. She literally said this, she said-- because when she said about

feet, I brought up the fact that this is a big issue because most insurance won't, there's nothing billable for foot care.

If you have an infection, I won't implicate anybody, but one of the nurses that I have worked with, not actually at St. John the Evangelist, she did tell me that she has to say that she sees an infection to be able to do anything. There used to be clinics for people with diabetes because they have a lot of issues with their feet. The way the medical care system is set up right now, it's left by the wayside.

Anyway, I brought up how much of an issue it actually is, foot care, especially for marginalized people, and that could be physical or financial or unhoused, all sorts of different reasons, why people have trouble caring for their own feet, but when I mentioned that, she said, "Yes, the church should be at the forefront of this type of stuff," and I was just completely blown away because that's pretty much how I feel.

This isn't just about foot care or foot-washing. I feel like if Jesus was washing a disciple's feet on that Thursday evening and saw an ulcer or an ingrown toenail or a splinter or a wound of any kind, that it wasn't just about this ceremonial water contact. There would be healing going on.

Greg: Our landing, what is a final word of encouragement you have for those listening to this episode or reading the transcript, especially a word of encouragement to the CDSP community?

Michael: Sorry, it's not just a word, but something I found very, I don't know the right word, but beyond helpful lately, when I've spoken to some of my mentors when I was back in DC for the grieving period after my brother's death, and I have uncertainties, everybody in their third year has all sorts of uncertainties, and I really realized this last year, how wherever you are on the academic spectrum, the third year is suffering.

People that are the total superstars of the class that are, in my opinion, going to be a bishop someday, they also were stressed about where they were going, if they could afford to live in that city with this great job being offered, even on the wage being offered, all this, that type of stuff that is just unfortunate and unnecessary, ultimately, and torturous. My uncertainties, when I took them to the people that I really trust as advisors, and I'm fussy about that, they all basically told me, "Shut up and pray."

That's how I might surmise my favorite theologian, Sarah Coakley. I think our listening abilities are not very good. We're great at petitions. We're great at intercessions. We know what we want. We know what we think we should have in this world and what the Kingdom of God would look like to us, but we, and definitely including myself, I'm not good at really listening, and that is a part of the bigger and more important problem is that we don't really know how to feel beloved of God.

The immensity of God's love is something that I feel like we're struggling with, beyond what's excusable for our developmental stage of humanity. We've been here a long time. We've had the Gospels a long time and we know. We've talked about our own

words around paper or through sermon. We are supposed to know that we're loved by God, and I feel like we have hardly been able to grasp that yet.

Greg: Michael, thanks so much for joining us on *Crossings Conversations*. It's been a privilege to hear your story and your heart.

Michael: Thank you very much. Thanks, Greg.

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