



**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 Klimovits:** This is Greg Klimovitz, a collaborator with Church Divinity School of the Pacific through Learning Forte. I'm here with Reverend Michael Barham and Reverend Stephen Hassett, parish priests who've recently joined the staff of CDSP. Welcome.

**Stephen Hassett:** Thank you.

**Michael Barham:** Good to be here.

**Greg:** For those who will see you walking around campus, what is it that you're bringing to CDSP? What is your job? What is your title, description, and what do you hope to bring into this community?

**Stephen:** My title is Director of Chapel and Campus Chaplain. Then I also teach one class for third-year ordination track students called Leadership for Ministry. Director of Chapel means I help, along with a lot of other people. There's a lot of inputs into the chapel function at the seminary. My role is to coordinate all those inputs to make a comprehensive, cohesive, worshipful experience for people who are also learning how to lead worship as part of their seminary training.

It's a learning by sharing the practice of worshiping together and reflecting on that practice as an aspect of our both shared community and shared life and an occasion for the students to learn things that they may not have experienced before. Then the Campus Chaplain piece is, as I understand it, a new role for the school. It's based on faculty and student reflections over the years that led the school to recognize that the spiritual life of the students in community doesn't necessarily take care of itself just because they're studying at seminary.

They're learning deeply in the academic fields of scripture, history, theology, liturgy, and other aspects of the tradition, but they've been uprooted in a way from their congregational life at home, and they're in a period of transition and change and being disassembled and reassembled for life in ministry. That's a very tender time in a person's spiritual life, and won't be the first time for many people, and it certainly won't be the last time for anybody going into ordained ministry. We're learning and talking all about what constitutes the skills and criteria, and requirements for leadership in the world of working ministry.

**Michael:** My title is Director of Student Services and Recruitment. That encompasses a lot but it's looking largely at how we serve the students and how we form community outside of the classroom, not disconnected from the classroom, but those pieces of their common life outside the classroom both for residential and low residential students.

It means I'm looking at things like policies and supporting students who are in leadership roles, like the leadership team, president, and officers. Those pieces of community life that happen around the table or outside the classroom and in residence.

The piece that really kept me interested in the position and why I think I'm here is to help the students with discernments. There's a shared element of work with the chaplain. Our work requires that we partner with each other and be in communication with each other and dream together and work together, but my role is less the general pastoral work, and very specifically helping people do discernment work for themselves, "What kind of church will I fit? What kind of church needs and can use my unique expression of the priesthood and the gifts that God has given me and all in between?"

There's a pastoral element to my job. I'm not the chaplain, but that piece of pastoral work of helping people discern is part of my job; being someone the students can go to with those kinds of questions outside of the classroom. I think that's why for both the chaplain and for my role, having someone who's been in the priesthood in parish ministry or other kinds of ministries, living out the priesthood outside of seminary is really helpful with those discernment pieces and the pastoral pieces.

**Greg:** Could you tell us briefly about who you are and your sense of call to ministry?

**Michael:** Sure. I first started feeling called to ministry while I was growing up in Mississippi. I grew up in Meridian, Mississippi in the Methodist Church and experienced the call partly from within, but also largely from people just asking and talking about it, and I kept following that question, or it kept following me. Eventually I went off to seminary, became Episcopalian while I was in seminary, moved out here to California afterwards, and got ordained. Calls keep coming, or the call keeps coming. Every day you wake up and hear what the call is and follow it.

**Stephen:** I can confidently say there's a lot of people called the ministry in the Episcopal Church who either come from a different branch of the Christian tree or who have had some experience of being away from the church. Then coming back later in

their adulthood and finding that their return occasioned the discovery of this sense of call. That was true for me as well.

I grew up Roman Catholic and then spent some time away from the church as a young adult in my 20s and moved to San Francisco. After a period of time, found my way to a local church called St. Gregory of Nyssa, and it just so happened to be an Episcopal Church.

**Greg:** Where have you served most recently? Particularly lean into a highlight from ministry over the most recent time you have served?

**Stephen:** I've been in parish ministry for 16 years. For the last eight years, until about a month ago, I was serving as the rector of a church in Orinda, California, which is really the next town over from Berkeley. The church is called St. Stephen's. Boy, there were a lot of highlights. We packed in a lot in those eight years. As everybody in parish ministry knows, the last couple of years have been especially intense. I will say a highlight for me was learning on the job what distinguishes a rector's responsibilities from associates or other clergy positions.

That is sharing responsibility for leadership of the whole organization. The real learning that you just cannot do it by yourself and you really better be looking out for and depending on the gifts and the experiences and the authority and expertise of people in the parish who have been around a few corners themselves and have something to offer you by way of what it means to lead an organization. Those were some of the, I would say most meaningful lessons and highlights that I had was sharing that work and those responsibilities with those people who worked beside me, and in some cases led me in my own leadership of the parish.

**Michael:** I echo that. I hope I learned that and went beyond intellectualizing that to practicing it. I served two small mission churches. Mission in Episcopal Church, or at least in this diocese, means that neither can afford a priest by themselves. I started at two churches who cobbled together a salary for me. Wonderful people. I think small churches just have so many of their own unique gifts and qualities. I was an associate for five years in St. Clement's in Honolulu, Hawaii and then came back to this Diocese of California in 2013.

Almost nine years, I was at these two churches, Holy Family in Half Moon Bay and Good Shepherd in Belmont. Geographically, it was a little bit of a challenge, but in terms of their personalities and their character and their quirks fit together really well. Beautiful people at those churches, a lot of faith, a lot of faithfulness. A lot to learn from the members in the congregation. What I found, the opposite of the first church I served, is serving two small mission churches there's always enough, even though there never feels like there's enough.

I can't tell you how many times-- Chaplain Stephen you may have experienced this too at your parish. There are so many times when I thought, how are we going to pay for this to be fixed or how are we going to get this program started? I'd get a check in the

mail from somebody who had been a member 20 years ago, and just we came to their mind and they sent a little gift, or somebody had some extra money for some reason and said, "I just thought of the church." We didn't even always pray for that. Maybe I should have and I would have gotten more, right? [chuckles]

Just how often we could live with what we had. Really what we had was our faith, and that's enough. That leads me to thinking about some of the questions and struggles of ministry. A lot of the things that are trappings of ministry, do we really need those? They're wonderful gifts and often great resources, but sometimes they're called the trusses. I think [crosstalk]

**Greg:** I really-- Go ahead.

**Michael:** Just God's abundance.

**Michael:** I'd say another example of that is, there were Sundays that I would walk into church and it was hard to have faith. Things were going on in my personal life that were really challenging. I feel like I always had it, but there were days it was hard to hold faith. There were days, I would walk into church, bebopping and easily holding the faith. One thing I learned is that on any given Sunday, no matter how small or big the congregation is, you're going to have somebody there who's easily holding the faith and somebody who's really struggling.

As a community, we hold faith together for each other. I always found that a blessing when people showed up regardless of their doubts or their fears or whatever. They would still show up because they knew if they came there, someone would help them have faith. Someone would help them through what they were going through too. That abundance isn't just financial. I was using that example earlier, but within the community, there's enough faith for us to do what we are called to do and to live in a community together.

**Greg:** Wondering what drew you to CDSP. What led you to discern a call to come here?

**Stephen:** Well, I am a two-time CDSP alum. In fact my whole entire experience in the Episcopal Church is in the Bay Area, in the Diocese of California. That limits me to some degree, but it also deepens and enriches, I would say my appreciation for what is here, because I spent a lot of time here. I got my MDiv in 2006 and then was ordained to the diaconate and then the priesthood. Then was working in parish ministry and maybe about four or five years later, I felt like I wasn't quite done with school.

I think it was clear to me, or what called me the CDSP, and what felt to me like a response between the community and some gift or desire that I have is to be among people who really feel deeply committed to their own Christian discipleship. There are lots of different reasons why people associate themselves with the parish church. I found myself continually wanting to organize in the parish around the kinds of things that people do when they're in seminary. Really gathering to study and deeply learn, frequently and regularly participate in shared worship, and really fearlessly examine questions of ecclesiology, mission, and identity as a matter of personal commitment.

Like what are we doing and how are we going to do it the best way. The seminary is the environment where those kinds of things are all on the table. I found myself over those many years, and part of the reason I think I continued to think about CDSP as a place where I might find myself, was because there was a deeper correspondence between where I feel gifted and have something to offer and the community of fellow travelers, so to speak that would want to share in those gifts and join me in the use of them.

**Michael:** What was drawing me to this season of my life was being embedded in a single community, and living in that community if possible and being present to that community. To enter into an academic community, obviously I'm not a classroom student, but to enter into that conversation that happens in the community with faculty, with students. Also to be able to be in a space where I'm reflecting as I'm offering. Every conversation I'm going to have is coming from and furthering that reflection.

In the last season of my life, I found myself just to exist in this space as a learner and as someone who's helping those who are learning and teaching. Hopefully offering little nuggets of wisdom when they accidentally come off.

**Greg:** A large part of discernment is curiosity and questions. In many ways, you could probably even say that a large part of being a parish priest is knowing what questions to ask and when. What I'm wondering here as we move through is, as a parish priest, what is a contemporary question that you're asking right now? Maybe even phrased differently, what is a question that you believe many parish priests are asking or should be asking related to their ministry going forward?

**Michael:** What I think I'm feeling and part of what drew me to this environment is a need to spend time rethinking what are the questions I need to be asking. To be able to clarify what are the questions that really matter to me in relation to what God's asking of me and of all of us. I am clear that the questions we've been asking as priests, the work we've been doing as priests, is facing a real reality test, right? If the pandemic didn't help us to see that, just the numbers of this in the seats and all of the challenges of what we call institutional church, is inviting us, demanding of us to ask ecclesial questions, and maybe stop asking institutional questions. For me, part of what's attracted to being here at CDSP is, I think, a hope that I'll be in a community where we are trying to grasp what are those essential questions. Faith and God's love being a very center.

**Stephen:** One of those former jobs that I mentioned that was preparing me for ministry unbeknownst to me, because at the time I had no idea that I was headed in this way. I was working at a restaurant after college waiting tables. It was a small family-owned cafe in Southern Connecticut. The owner was from Argentina and was a deeply pastoral presence in his own way. If you've ever worked in a restaurant, there are these peak times where just the demand surges and everybody's maxed and the kitchen is going nuts and the wait staff are coming in and out. The customers are impatient because they got a movie that they're going to go see and where's their order.

During those times you might come into the kitchen with an energy of anxiety or panic in your work. The owner, whose name was Manny, was always just the calmest, most grounded person in the middle of all that busyness. He would perceive and sense your anxiety and he would ask you, "What's going to happen? Are you scared?" [laughs] Somehow it always had the effect of reminding you like, "Oh, okay, these orders are going to get placed. The food will be prepared, delivered to the table. People will eat and be satisfied and then it'll calm down again."

The church is going through a time of great uncertainty. Its leadership and many of its parishioners, I think, to me, feel like the staff at that restaurant when we all felt a little overwhelmed by the demands being placed on us. I think maybe Manny's questions are the questions that could help us, like what is going to happen? Are we scared? Then I think we find that ourselves reflected in the stories of scripture when other people felt overwhelmed.

They didn't know what was going to happen, and God comes and finds them. In the Episcopal Church, we haven't necessarily always owned those stories. I think we've imagined a story of ourselves as secure and safe and unchanging and dependable in some ways. We are going through changes now and there's insecurity and unsafety that might be new and unfamiliar to us, but it's not new or unfamiliar to the people of God. I think when we think about the questions that we might ask ourselves, and I'm thinking about from the parish to the seminary, what is going to happen?

Are we scared? Where can we see God leading us through those uncertainties, unsafeties and demands that can cause us to feel stressed out and unsure? I know there's a way.

**Greg:** There's a reason why the most popular refrain throughout scripture is, "Do not be afraid." I think what you're alluding, this "do not be afraid" is not to push against and dismiss any pain or hurt or angst, but to be reminded that there is a bigger picture. That there is a broader narrative

**Stephen:** Well, the angelic voices don't need to come and tell us not to be afraid, if we aren't afraid. [chuckles]

**Greg:** I love that. Share with us what you believe is a primary challenge parish priests are encountering presently. You don't have to resolve the challenge. You can just bring it into light-- [chuckles]

**Stephen:** Just referring back to that, this really maybe unprecedented, at least in living memory, period of transformation and change in the church, which might look like loss, I think the challenge that priests in the parish face is to continue to be faithful for the sake of their congregations who are going through new experiences, and who, in their anxiety, think the church might be dying when in reality it's being made new.

**Michael:** In some ways, the challenge facing a lot of clergy is the challenge facing all of their people. On one hand, trying to be faithful and anchored, and, on the other hand, realizing that society in the world and our religion is changing, that we have no control

over that. God does, but we do not. Being able to see what's needed and what's coming and interpret that in a way that makes sense to people who only understand an old way so that they can enter into that new way without feeling--Not that they haven't sacrificed something but that they're still connected to a thread that is transcendent, beyond just this whatever new thing is we're doing.

I think in Hebrews, they're trying to say, look, the old way isn't here anymore. It's not whether we want it or not, it just isn't here. We can either sit here wishing it, and not do anything about it, or we can come up with something completely new. Or we can figure out a way that is carrying forward in our hearts what we love and what we understood, but making sense of it in light of this new world that we have.

**Greg:** That's a good word.

**Michael:** That's especially hard for us Episcopal clergy because you got to have at least three general conventions agree with you.

**Greg:** What is a word of encouragement that you have for aspiring clergy and the CDSP community that you now are joining?

**Michael:** I want to say, just remember what the angels said, "Do not be afraid." Jesus tells us, "I'm the way." We don't have to make the way. We have the way. Jesus is the way, and we who are called, they're many sheep of different folds. Jesus has his way of reaching them. But for those of us who choose to be Christians and those of us called to be clergy, we have to remember whose way it is we are advocating and teaching about and calling people to be part of.

**Stephen:** I would say those who go through the desolate valley will find it a place of springs.

**Greg:** Reverend Stephen and Reverend Michael, thanks so much for joining us on *Crossings Conversations*. May the Lord be with 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 only Episcopal seminary on the west coast and subscribe to Crossings Magazine at [cdsp.edu](http://cdsp.edu)