

Aloha my dear Siblings in Christ Jesus,

Let us pray.

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were being cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

In my written report to this Convention, I shared that I have made some sense of our current reality by praying the Psalms. I noted that I have been particularly helped by a little book: Spirituality of the Psalms by Walter Brueggemann (Augsburg Press, 2002). Brueggemann suggests that the Psalms have been and can be prayed as:

- Psalms of Orientation
- Psalms of Disorientation
- Psalms of New Orientation

As we look to 2021, we are singing songs that will lead us into a new orientation – a whole new way of being Church and of being a community. I concluded my report with the four verses of Psalm 96.

Psalm 96:1-4 (Common English Bible translation)

- ¹ Sing to the Lord a new song!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth!
- ² Sing to the Lord! Bless his name!
Share the news of his saving work every single day!
- ³ Declare God's glory among the nations;
declare his wondrous works among all people
- ⁴ because the Lord is great and so worthy of praise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has hastened a change that has been upon us for some time. Collectively, we haven't wanted to truly engage the reality. We have talked about our "aging" congregations and the decline in the population of Hawai'i. We know about the high cost of living here in the Islands and the impact on Church life. We have underutilized buildings and properties that are – especially here in Honolulu – not far from one another. Yes, we have discussed, we had property reports, we have moved to local formation programs for ordained leaders, we have more non-stipendiary or part salaried clergy, etc.

The pandemic has changed everything. We now must truly be a pilgrim people. This pandemic will continue to be with us for some time and, after it has lifted, we will be changed. Psalm 121 better describes our new way of being:

Psalm 121 (Common English Bible translation)

- ¹ I raise my eyes toward the mountains.
Where will my help come from?
- ² My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.
- ³ God won't let your foot slip.
Your protector won't fall asleep on the job.
- ⁴ No! Israel's protector
never sleeps or rests!
- ⁵ The Lord is your protector;
the Lord is your shade right beside you.
- ⁶ The sun won't strike you during the day;
neither will the moon at night.
- ⁷ The Lord will protect you from all evil;
God will protect your very life.
- ⁸ The Lord will protect you on your journeys—
whether going or coming—
from now until forever from now.

Our life as the Body of Christ will be changed. I suspect that online worship and formation will need to be part of our life from now on. We will need to understand how to incorporate folk in the church who show up online and only occasionally join us in person. We will have to get comfortable with technology.

Congregations in close proximity to one another must learn how to work together. With office technology, every church doesn't need its own office, copy machine, accounting system, etc. More and more, as in the secular world, folk will work from home. Is an office even needed except to store files and records?

More importantly, with virtual formation and even worship, do we – as the Body of Christ -- need all of our buildings that sit empty 90% of the week? Yes, congregations are needed, but do they need a dedicated space for worship once a week? As Episcopal congregations, can't we share worship spaces? There is no requirement that there be one congregation to one exclusive worship space. Do congregations have to worship in "church" buildings? Can we have entirely virtual congregations? What about pop-up church? How big can we truly make the mission field?

Some of the changes are very practical. In the 2021 Diocesan budget, Diocesan Council has factored in a two-month waiver of assessment. We don't know what the future holds. Rae Costa and the Diocesan Support Center Staff have cut costs. We have frozen compensation and limited travel. Some members of the team continue to work from home. The Diocesan Council, Standing Committee, and Commission on Ministry – and likely other commissions, committees or task forces of the Diocese – will have virtual meetings throughout 2021 even if the pandemic subsides. Regular in-person Diocesan meetings may be a thing of the past. Perhaps in 2022 and afterwards, such groups will only meet in person a couple of times a year. We have to prepare to be more agile and discern what we really need to support the congregations in mission and ministry. With that, however, the Diocesan Support Center is receiving more and more questions

and requests for help regarding employee issues and property management. Congregations – Missions and Parishes – are increasingly asking for help.

I have asked Diocesan Council to engage the congregations to get a sense of their ministry and purpose. Here I'm not talking about finances or property management, but the fundamental grounding of each congregation. "Why" does your congregation exist? The point of this is not to judge the congregations, but to help your elected leaders on Diocesan Council understand how we are doing as a whole by talking with the leaders of each individual Mission and Parish. These conversations will be with the Vestries and Bishop's Committees as well as the clergy. You see, I think 2021 will be about discernment regarding what the new reality for our local churches will be like. If the Diocese is a gathering of congregations, the health of each constituent unit – your congregation – is essential to the health of the whole. That impacts how the Diocesan Council directs resources and how the Diocesan Support Center can best help in practical ways. You will be hearing from the Diocesan Council team in the near future.

The Standing Committee is my Council of Advice and I go to them with tough issues. In 2021, we will conclude the re-evaluation of the Constitution and Canons that they began last year but needed to be put on hold during the pandemic, and their recommendations will be coming back at next year's Annual Meeting. Most importantly, I will ask them to help evaluate the Diocesan Support Center (DSC) staff's roles and help prepare new position descriptions for each of us – including me. I think we must even consider the location of the Diocesan Support Center Offices. The purpose of the Diocesan Support Center is to support the ministry of the Bishop and to help clergy, lay leaders, and congregations. If change is upon us, what does that work look like for the next five years? We must not assume that past functions and activities will be returning. Do we all need to be in the same office space? Do we need as much space as we take up on the second floor of the Cathedral's Memorial Building? How will we address the need for better and larger archives to hold historic materials and records we legally must keep in perpetuity?

There will be some changes in duties now. Canon Sandy Graham has been with us since the last quarter of 2016. He serves as Canon for Congregational Life and Leadership (including being Transition Officer). This past May, he was awarded a Doctor of Ministry degree from Virginia Theological Seminary. With that, I have asked him to take on a greater role with the Commission on Ministry (COM) and more teaching with Waiolaihui'ia. I hope that the COM will take a larger role in the formation and training of all the baptized, helping congregations engage the programs we already offer and encouraging more involvement. I am also formally expanding his position description as Canon for Congregational Life and Leadership to include being the "executive officer" of the Diocese. While that may have practically been the case before, I wanted to be clear that he fills such a role in our Diocesan common life.

For myself, I want to be more actively involved with the Reconciliation Task Force and the Creation Care Task Force. Why? I think the two pressing issues for Hawai'i in the years ahead will be to come to grips with (1) our own racism and our colonial history and (2) continued environmental degradation of the coasts and the ocean. I am pleased that Jazzy Bostock has agreed to be the convener of the Reconciliation Task Force and Annalise Pasalo to be the convener of the Creation Care Task Force. We live in an anxious and conflicted world. It will

only be through our ministry of reconciliation with one another, with our history and with the environment that we will truly experience the Beloved Community of God.

Personally, in many ways, I have thrived during this time of pandemic. Offering a Monday virtual reflection and a Wednesday Bible study has renewed my vocation as a teaching Bishop. I have come to know and appreciate our clergy as I have joined virtual worship and listened to wonderful sermons, and I have gathered with most of them online every Tuesday for study and conversation. My daily opportunities for prayer and study have been enlivened during these “interesting” times. I have even lost over thirty pounds through a healthy diet and walking (when allowed by the Mayor of Honolulu). This could all happen because the Diocesan Support Center staff has continued to serve you and me with care and efficiency even when working from home. I have not been worried. I am also under the watchful and loving eye of Bea. I want to continue my teaching ministry and spend more time with God’s people and the clergy. I can do so because of the staff we now have in the Diocesan Support Center, and our faithful clergy and lay leaders in the congregations – and with the support of Bea. I can honestly say that I have not been afraid.

I, like you, look forward to an end to the pandemic. Sometime in 2021, I hope to finally hold my Granddaughter, Lisann, for the first time and to play again with Marcus. I want to get back to a regular schedule of visitations with you – God’s people. Most importantly, I want us to face the new “regular” of our post pandemic Church, Islands, and world with hope. Paul reminds us in Second Corinthians (2 Corinthians 5:17): “So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!” The next year will be filled with new things. I can’t tell you now all that might mean. We have had to adapt throughout 2020. We have learned to be nimble and creative. As I noted from Psalm 121, “The Lord will protect you on your journeys – whether going or coming – from now until forever from now.” We have begun the journey. We have just begun. I expect 2021 to be an adventure.

Be assured my Siblings in Christ that God loves you.

And as your Bishop, I love you.

Please know that I pray for you every day.

Please pray for me.

Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:20-21).