

2023 Bishop's Convention Address

Aloha Kakahiaka.

As I begin my Convention Address today, let us remember that we gather in the Ahupua'a of Waikiki. On land that was, before it was drained by the Ala Wai Canal, rich with the kalo patches and fishponds of nā kānaka 'ōiwi. I stand on a bit of land deemed a waste after the Canal changed the landscape of this corner of O'ahu and, so, it was procured by a Bishop for 'Iolani School in the early 1930's with the Great Depression and World War II interrupting the School's move here. Now, it is one of the finest schools in the nation – if not the world.

I take this moment as your Bishop to honor and give thanks for the founding patrons of our Diocese, King Kamehameha IV (Alekanetero 'Iolani Kalanikualiholiho Maka o 'Iouli Kūnuiākea o Kūkā'ilimoku) for whom this School is named and blessed Queen Emma (Emma Kalanikaumaka'amano Kaleleonālani Na'ea Rooke), who tradition has it, gave the School its name.

I acknowledge the trust they committed to our Church in 1862 to care for their people – nā kānaka 'ōiwi – and all of the children of these Islands, and for our responsibility to care for all of creation. As the Bishop of the Church invited to these islands, I deeply regret that we have not always fulfilled our responsibility through these many decades. We have often failed and turned a blind eye to those around us. For those things which we as the Church and as individual Episcopalians have done and the many things we have left undone that contributed to the harm inflicted on nā kānaka 'ōiwi and upon these Islands, I offer our collective regret. I ask God's forgiveness. nā kānaka 'ōiwi were here, are here, and will be here. I ask the prayers of our blessed ancestors and of you, God's people, that we, God's Episcopal Church in Hawai'i, will have the will and courage to better fulfill our responsibility – kā mākou kuleana – to the people of these Islands and to God's creation.

As I have at past Annual Meetings of Convention, I invite you to join me now in saying the prayer that St Francis of Assisi offered to God before the Crucifix at the chapel of San Damiano in about 1205.

Let us pray together:

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me
true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out
Your holy and true command. Amen.

We remember that Francis prayed these words after he heard the voice of God to “Go and build my Church.” He took it to literally mean rebuilding the ruined chapel, but he soon understood the command as something much, much more.

I wrote my written report to this Convention on August 6th, late on a Sunday afternoon. It was the Feast of the Transfiguration. It was also two days before the Maui fires. Two days before the building of Holy Innocents Church and much of Lahaina were destroyed. Two days before things changed. I decided to leave the report without alteration.

Much of my ministry as your Bishop has been caught in major before and after events: before and after the Global Financial Crisis, before and after the COVID pandemic, and before and immediately after the Maui fires.

Internationally, we have seen the continued naked aggression in Russia's unprovoked war against Ukraine.

And then more recently, we have witnessed the heinous Hamas terrorist attack on innocent civilians in Israel with the cold intent of the murder of Jews – babies, the elderly, men, women, and children. This has been followed by Israeli military action in Gaza destroying the lives of innocent Palestinians – children and adults -- as collateral casualties in the war against Hamas.

In many ways, we are still living in the irresolution of the “after” times of events that commentators keep referring to as “once in a lifetime” or “unprecedented.”

We – you and I – have navigated these times together. As your Bishop, I have never known a time of internal diocesan strife. I have always felt bolstered by your prayers and your love. Mahalo.

There will be a report to this Convention about the recovery efforts on Maui. There will be much to do in the days ahead. We are not sure what the days ahead will hold. The impact on the people of Holy Innocents and Lahaina are incalculable. All of Maui, and in fact, all our Islands and all our churches will be impacted with rising insurance costs and changes in life caused by the fire and world events. We will need to face the years ahead with humility, adaptability, patience, and generosity.

The theme of this Convention was taken from the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:6: “Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full.” What does being “hungry and thirsty for righteousness” mean in our times?

We must acknowledge reality. For many, it's still a time of lamentation: the unrelenting cry to God. The fire and the wars remind us that there are times that all one can do is rail against God and cry. There are some in our Diocese that cry with the Psalmist (Psalm 13): “How long will you forget me, Lord? Forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long will I be left to my own wits, agony filling my heart?”

We – as Episcopalians in Hawai'i -- must commit ourselves to the people of Maui, of Lahaina, and of Holy Innocents. Both now and in the months and years ahead after everyone else has forgotten and the news cycle has moved on, we must commit to being respectful and engaged partners in the rebuilding of Maui and of the Holy Innocents' congregation. Our Church was established in Lahaina at the request of King Kamehameha IV. We have a responsibility to be

there, and to be sure that whatever happens is done with respect to the culture and history of that place. We must be the voice of righteousness and God's justice for all in the new Lahaina.

For the past three months, the "righteousness" of God has been about direct care. There are too many people to thank for the response to the Maui fires. I always thank the Diocesan Support Center staff, but the many hours devoted to Maui in addition to their "regular" jobs has been remarkable. Processing many donations, engaging the insurance company, helping Holy Innocents, coordinating with Episcopal Relief and Development, working on communication, and so much more. Rae, Nani, Sam, Sybil, Fatima, Brett, Sonny: Thank you. Sandy, I especially appreciate you being on Maui for two days each week for much of the time since the fire. Your Diocesan Support Center staff serves you – God's people – sacrificially and with love. Over these past three months, they have been, for me, witnesses of sacrificial love. Mahalo.

God's people on Maui have stepped up in remarkable ways. The pastoral care provided by our clergy has been a witness to a broken community. The volunteers of A Cup of Cold Water have stepped up to fill a gap in care of the houseless and the forgotten. Folk have taken in displaced family and friends. Episcopalians have come from Kaua'i churches to volunteer. I am proud of our spiritual 'ohana.

I must thankfully acknowledge the many financial gifts that have come in from around the world and from you – God's people in this Diocese. Many of our own congregations have taken up special collections on behalf of the relief effort. There is a gift from the Sisters of the Transfiguration who served for decades at St. Andrew's Priory School for Girls in memory of a Sister who was born on Maui. There are small gifts with notes from children. We have received gifts from the Diocese of Taiwan and the Philippine Independent Church. Literally, hundreds have generously responded.

Some gifts have been transformational and have actually made me cry. The donation from a financially struggling congregation of weeks of proceeds from the sales in their thrift shop. A gift of \$100,000 from a single congregation allowed us to create the position of Missioner for Maui without having to wait for grants and other donations.

In the face of tragedy, there have been many examples of courage, love, and solidarity. As Christians, we know that acts of sacrificial love change the world. Thank you.

We are reminded in the face of tragedy that the Church is founded on the ministry reconciliation. As Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:20: "So we are ambassadors who represent Christ. God is negotiating with you through us. We beg you as Christ's representatives, 'Be reconciled to God!'" Reconciliation is grounded in faith, trust, and relationship. It is to "hunger and thirst after righteousness."

We live in a world where people no longer trust one another. Again, Paul writes in Ephesians 4:30-31: "Don't make the Holy Spirit of God unhappy—you were sealed by him for the day of redemption. Put aside all bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil." We live in an age of anger, shouting, and slander -- in an age of hate and violence. The leaders of our nation – of the world – have fed us the false dichotomy of us versus

them. We are all the children of a loving God. If the Maui fire teaches us anything, it must be that we need one another, there are no strangers in God's world only siblings, and to "hunger and thirst after righteousness" is to live pono with one another and all of creation.

At the virtual House of Bishops meeting in September, we only discussed two things: The numerical decline of the Episcopal Church – and of religious affiliation more generally in the United States -- and clergy misconduct (especially of bishops). Our society is changing.

Demographers at the meeting pointed out that the Episcopal Church is returning to its place in society that it had before the baby boom after World War II. As a denomination, we are closer in size to 1930 than in 1970. What were the take aways for me?

1. As an Episcopal Church and each congregation, we must be clear on our identity. We strive to be an inclusive, liturgically centered, and faith filled people of a loving God. We are "liberal" in the best sense of that word: willing to respect the dignity of every human being, to be open to opinions different from one's own, and willing to engage new ideas. We are also "traditional" with a healthy respect for the past, recognizing that some practices, while not essential, can help on our spiritual journey. We must have intentional communities with clear theological and liturgical understanding that welcome shared leadership and embrace cooperation. We must "hunger and thirst after righteousness."
2. Numerically small congregations can still be effective ministers of the Gospel. We can get bogged down with buildings and spaces too large for the number of people gathered or that drain our energy. Missions must be right-sized for the context. Even the smallest congregations can "hunger and thirst after righteousness."
3. We must work together. Yes, as a Diocese, some experiments in sharing have failed – Episcopal Church on West O'ahu comes to mind. We must keep trying. I am delighted by the collaboration of Calvary, Emmanuel, and St. Matthew's on the Windward side of O'ahu. St. Columba's has seamlessly become part of the Parish of St. James on the Big Island. Sharing and collaboration does not mean a loss of congregational identity. We need one another and that will all the more be true in the years ahead.
4. Things are never going to be the same. We are called to be faithful Episcopalians. Our life together is shaped by Scripture, the liturgy, and healthy relationships. With prayer and humility, we will change to be God's presence in the world as it is and not as it was. Yes, it will be hard sometimes, but it will be delightful at other times.

In broader Church news, much has come out about allegations of bishops' misconduct. They are serious. The Episcopal Church and especially General Convention continues to strive for a system of clergy discipline that is healing and just. Our canons state: "By virtue of Baptism, all members of the Church are called to holiness of life and accountability to one another. The Church and each Diocese shall support their members in their life in Christ and seek to resolve conflicts by promoting healing, repentance, forgiveness, restitution, justice, amendment of life and reconciliation among all involved or affected. This Title applies to Members of the Clergy, who have by their vows at ordination accepted additional responsibilities and accountabilities for doctrine, discipline, worship and obedience." I share this to acknowledge that the Church is a human institution and clergy, even bishops – like all human beings – make mistakes and must be

held accountable in Christ's love. You – especially those attending General Convention in the summer – will likely hear more about this in the months ahead.

Two areas of our common life still need focus in the years ahead:

1. The work of the Reconciliation Task Force requires the commitment of every Episcopalian in this Diocese to commit to honest conversation and openness. The program the Reconciliation Task Force is tailored for is life in these Islands. It is not a packaged program from North America. It is our opportunity to engage racial reconciliation in a way appropriate to this context. We “hunger and thirst after righteousness” in our communities and in our churches.
2. The Environmental Justice and Creation Care Task Force continues to challenge us to recognize the harm we humans have done and are doing to God's creation. We must repent and change our ways. We need more of us involved in this ministry. We must listen to the indigenous voices of these Islands. Time for change is past. We must “hunger and thirst after righteousness” of the earth.

We also must continue to call to ministry – lay and ordained. First, we need to understand that there is a national clergy shortage. There are two realities for the Episcopal Church: (1) The number of clergy ordained has not kept pace with the number of clergy who have retired. (2) More than half of all Episcopal churches nationally have part-salaried or non-stipendiary clergy. As this has happened, seminaries have closed or become entirely online. Many, many dioceses have local formation programs like our own Waiolaihui‘ia Center for Ministry.

I am reminded that this is in fact a return to earlier models of clergy training. Our own Bishop Kennedy trained in a regional theological school in Colorado that didn't offer degrees, and Bishop Hanchett had one year of seminary and otherwise did local formation here at home.

For us, it will mean continuing to strengthen Waiolaihui‘ia Center for Ministry to provide training for licensed lay ministry. The first class of lay preachers, worship leaders, and catechists have been licensed. Some on the path to ordination will still be formed in the local program for ordination. More will engage in online and hybrid programs. Others will still go off for education at residential seminaries.

For us – for you and me – we must keep calling folk to ordination and important licensed lay ministries. We will need to fill the gaps in ministry and mission. We will need priests and deacons from these Islands – especially more deacons. We need leaders who understand the culture. The emerging reality of our common life will require teams of ministers and the ability to adapt to emerging situations. I must count on you – God's people – to raise up and support faithful leaders – ordained and lay. We need leaders who “hunger and thirst after righteousness.”

Speaking of leadership, I need to address an elephant here in Seto Hall. As some of you know, I turned 65 last month. When I interviewed Sandy to be my Canon, he asked me when I was planning to retire. The question made me smile because I asked the same question of Bishop Chang when he interviewed me to be his Canon. It is something Bishop's Canons need to know

for professional planning. I replied that I thought it would be sometime toward the end of 2026. My intention has not changed. This is not a specific announcement about a timetable, but I trust you and I love you. You deserve to know my hope and intention. I am in conversation with the Standing Committee and the Diocesan Council to plan for a healthy transition and the election of the sixth Bishop of Hawai'i. The planning has to include planning about the budget and the calendar. I promise to do my best to avoid surprises. My hope and plan is to serve you until my retirement, and then to support and serve my successor as Bishop Chang supported me. Please hold me in your prayers asking God for good health and wisdom in the days ahead.

These past three months have reminded me personally of our need for one another and for God. The loss of Holy Innocents' sanctuary reminds me of the transitory nature of life. I have come to reject the notion of legacy. The idea of leaving a legacy as an individual is a prideful fallacy. We don't leave behind a legacy. All that we have and all that we are and that we do is a gift from God. When we die, we are completely forgotten by the world in a few short years. No one will care about the projects we have completed, the buildings we have built (or maintained), or even the words we have spoken. The difference we make is the lives we have touched and the love of God we have shared in the here and the now.

The notion of legacy is grounded in the fear of death. One of the reasons I don't appreciate sharing of eulogies during the liturgy at a funeral – I'm ok maybe with them before the liturgy begins – is that we Christians aren't afraid of death, and we know that it is not about us.

Those who gathered at Holy Innocents in Lahaina since 1863 leave us their prayers and the ripple of faith through the years. The building is gone. The legacy of past clergy and people was not in the buildings. In a short time, no one will remember the buildings. The impact is in the unseen countless lives that were changed by the love of God within those people. This gives us the courage to hunger and thirst after righteousness. We don't fear. We know that it is not about us.

As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58:

This is what I'm saying, brothers and sisters: Flesh and blood can't inherit God's kingdom. Something that rots can't inherit something that doesn't decay. Listen, I'm telling you a secret: All of us won't die, but we will all be changed—in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet. The trumpet will blast, and the dead will be raised with bodies that won't decay, and we will be changed. It's necessary for this rotting body to be clothed with what can't decay, and for the body that is dying to be clothed in what can't die. And when the rotting body has been clothed in what can't decay, and the dying body has been clothed in what can't die, then this statement in scripture will happen:

*Death has been swallowed up by a victory.
Where is your victory, Death?
Where is your sting, Death?*

Death's sting is sin, and the power of sin is the Law.

Thanks be to God, who gives us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

As a result of all this, my beloved brothers and sisters, you must stand firm, unshakable, excelling in the work of the Lord as always, because you know that your labor isn't going to be for nothing in the Lord.

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Amen.