



Convention Address, 2023

Good morning and welcome to the 43rd convention of the Episcopal Diocese of El Camino Real. It is with joy that we reflect together on the year that has passed since our last convention, and that same joy calls us to step forth into what God has in store for us in the years to come.

I want to remind us that our diocese sits on the rich soil that was the ancestral lands farmed and roamed, and the waters fished, by the Esselen, Costanoan, Ohlone, Salinan, Yokuts and Chumash peoples-- among others about whom little or nothing is known. These lands have, throughout generations, also welcomed many people from different cultures and places all over the globe--including people from what is now Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and parts east in our country.

As a Diocese, we are a people enriched by our shared heritage, saddened by failing to love each other as neighbors, and repentant of greed and violence we have done and still do to each other. We are a work in progress, and our ministries are ever evolving as we strive to be the church that God calls us to be.

Surrounding this work and watching over us as we engage it are our cloud of witnesses, our saints. Some of these souls go far back in history, others are more recent, as read in our Necrology at this convention when we honor the people who have gone from our communities this year.

I have here with me a picture of my grandmother, a stalwart pillar of the church, the person my grandfather suffered to remind us, delayed leaving the church so that she could turn out the lights. At her memorial service, I stayed behind to turn out the lights, knowing that the very next day, someone else would take over that simple task. I am reminded of her dedication and faithfulness every day.

You also have beloved people to honor, who led with wisdom in their time and place. These souls provided the foundation on which we stand; many of them knew that they were builders of a future, and they would not see the finished product of their labors.

So it is with our work. As a prayer attributed to Oscar Romero reminds us, we are prophets of a future not our own. To that end, you and I faithfully work to build God's kingdom, living into our baptismal covenant, proclaiming the Good News, working for justice and peace, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

Recently, the Visioning Taskforce and I conducted six sessions called "Glimpses of God's Dream." We listened throughout the diocese, both in-person and on-line, heard your hopes and dreams, what you believe God may be up to in our diocese. You did not disappoint, for we are more interested in serving others than in self-preservation; we care more about connection than conformity.

Together, we understand that value of what we have, and we are thoughtful about what it takes to live into what we glimpse as God's dream in our place in God's kingdom.

Last year, our West Coast Collaborative, which is our School for Ministry, completed its first year of the Lay Preaching Course. Now toward the end of our second year offering the Lay Preaching cohort, with the dioceses of San Diego and Northern California, we are also in the first year of our two-year formation program for deacons. Each year, we add a layer to this foundation that develops leadership for the church we are becoming.

Along with that, we now have added another Community Trailblazer. The Rev. Jen Crompton and the Rev. Deacon Joel Martinez serve in very different congregations and towns in our diocese, leading people out of the church buildings and stepping into their communities to discover new ways to engage and be challenged. Their work is brave and hopeful, and their willingness to patiently find companions to embark on this discovery with them is what will shape our future and keep us nimble.

These two initiatives are essential to the church that God calls into being, and God's people strive to discern what the church is to be in every generation. The church of Thomas Aquinas did not look the same as the church of Queen Elizabeth

I, nor of John Wesley. The church of Bishop William Ingraham Kip is not the same as the church of my grandmother, nor is this the church we have now.

How society views church and institutions in general, and how we have lagged in essential ways in the formation of our lay and ordained people has led to a shortage of ordained clergy in all denominations, and ours is no exception. Here in the Diocese of El Camino Real, we currently have 13 congregations in transition, with only a few offering full-time priest positions. Other dioceses around us have even more vacancies. Canon Martha works very hard with congregations to persuade them to do the essential work of transition, and even in the best of times, change isn't easy. We have to adjust our expectations, as the "one priest/one parish" model is fading fast. Yet, with this comes opportunity: the extensive training of our lay leaders, and the adoption of new models for clergy/parish partnerships. These opportunities are not new ones; they just arrived here a bit later than they have in other places in the west.

So, yes, we have challenges, and we are also delighting in new ways of being together and connecting with each other.

One of the highlights of this year was the first in-person Spring Renewal held in April. We engaged in deep conversation about our baptismal covenant and our personal pilgrim journeys--and the joy of sharing in food, fellowship and fun was palpable. There was a moment that will remain imprinted on me: at the end of the Eucharist, with the rhythmic music, we began to dance. It was a stunning moment that I hoped would never end: like David, we freely danced before the Lord.

Our next Spring Renewal will be May 17 and 18, and our Keynote will be the Right Rev. Michael Hunn, Bishop of the Diocese of the Rio Grande. Bishop Hunn is the former Canon to the Ordinary for our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry. He will talk with us about our theme, "Stepping out with Soul," a theme that arose from our experience at our Spring Renewal, and our shared dance that last day.

Another dance that had a profound effect on me was a brief time that I spent at the Installation of the Bishop in Navajoland this past May. One evening, there was dinner, and then the floor was cleared for dancing. While usually in my experience, indigenous peoples dance, and the rest of us watch, because we don't know what it means, and perhaps we are embarrassed about our missteps. In this

case, however, the dance was very simple, and we were all invited, not only invited, but expected to join in.

We gently made our way, moving with our partners side-by-side, in a shuffle—almost like a walk with a spring in our step. Unlike the unbridled whirling of our Spring Renewal, this was a community expression of a sorrowful past, and hope for a shared future. As I danced, I reflected on the invitation that was before us, offered, yet unspoken. Cautiously, I stepped in, the next day, asking the Bishop for an ongoing conversation.

Curious about what a shared future might look like, the Bishop of Navajoland and I have arranged for six people from our diocese to travel with me to Navajoland this coming week. In imitation of the dance I just described, we want to walk together, to learn from each other and to discover what our relationship could become. We will learn about the Blessing Way of the Dine people, and the Episcopal Churches' history in that place. Please pray for us, that we will have open minds and hearts, and that we will listen much more than we talk. Help us to be faithful and hear the invitation that is extended.

“Stepping out with Soul,” our theme for this coming year, is an ongoing invitation to dance in many different ways before the Lord. Surrounded by those who have stepped out ahead of us, we may swirl or we may shuffle, as you and I connect the joys and sorrows of our history with the thoughtful reflection of our present so that we move into a future that is authentic and faithful.

As faithful pilgrims we remember that ours is the way of love and peace, and that the legacy we leave depends on the steps we take every day. How we act, how we speak shapes the future for those who will be welcomed after us in this rich place that we call the Diocese of El Camino Real. As faithful followers of Jesus, we are prophets of a future not our own.

