

*What image or story from the Bible enlivens and enriches your own faith? What is the Good News found within this story that we are called to share with the world?*

My favorite feast day in the church calendar is the Day of Pentecost. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, on that day the Holy Spirit descends upon those first disciples and they are transformed by the grace and joy of the Lord God. I, too, have felt that power of transformation in my own life. In high school I attended a Happening youth retreat in the Episcopal Church and, because of that weekend, I decided to follow Jesus. Through that experience, I knew that I was loved and known by God and by my fellow Christians. The transformation to discipleship did not take place immediately, though. Like the disciples who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and like so many Christians I know, the Holy Spirit's work on my life is an ongoing process towards love and holiness. I can point to that weekend as the watershed moment in my life, as a Day of Pentecost for me, but I also trust that the Holy Spirit is still working on me.

The Acts reading also captures my imagination because the Holy Spirit gives the disciples courage to go out and proclaim that good news of resurrection. Following Jesus is not simply about receiving the gifts of God; it is about sharing the good news so that the whole world can experience this transformative power of love made known to us in the Holy Spirit.

This experience of the Holy Spirit gives me courage, too. Though we may not face the same obstacles as the first disciples, I believe that the people in our world today are just as desperate to hear the liberating good news of Jesus Christ as they were two thousand years ago. We are facing an epidemic of loneliness and anxiety in our culture. Every day in my pastoral ministry at our church, school, and college ministry I talk with people who are struggling to find purpose and meaning. I listen to people of all ages and generations articulate a desire for a community that will both accept them for who they are and that will also help them make sense of their lives. When I hear all of those concerns and anxieties, I know that the Episcopal Church still has work to do. Like the Holy Spirit did on that first Pentecost, I believe that the Lord God is calling the Episcopal Church to foster communities in which all people can experience that joy, grace, and connection. That is why I have dedicated myself to proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ; God's love has transformed my life and I know it can transform the world.

*Why do you think there are declining numbers in the Episcopal Church and what is your vision for supporting Episcopal communities to find new vitality? What are some examples of how you have addressed this in other settings?*

I think that the Episcopal Church is declining because we have lost our sense of purpose. The *Book of Common Prayer* says, “the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ” (855). I believe that people are leaving the Episcopal Church or joining other faith communities because we are not fulfilling this mission. Instead of focusing on the life-giving parts of our Church that transform lives and communities - worship, Bible study, service, and fellowship - we have become too focused on maintaining customs and structures that do not serve our mission. I am not resentful or disillusioned by our decline, but as Saint Paul says, “I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches” (II Corinthians 11:28).

However, I believe that God can restore our mission because I have seen this happen firsthand. I became the rector of Holy Comforter Episcopal Church in Spring, Texas in 2012 and by focusing on evangelism and welcoming new members into the congregation, the parish experienced a season of tremendous growth. By raising up and equipping new clergy and lay leaders, Holy Comforter was able to build an entirely new worship space, grow to over two hundred worshipers on a Sunday, and double the annual budget. In order to foster this growth, though, we had to let go of some of the parish’s customs and traditions. This was difficult, but the transition enabled the congregation to dream about how we could share the good news of Jesus Christ. Our renewed focus on the parish’s mission allowed us to make a more positive impact on the wider community.

At Trinity Episcopal Church in Galveston, where I now serve as rector, we have focused on building bridges with our school and restoring our role as a vibrant center of faith and art downtown. Plus, we have worked to build collaborative partnerships with the other institutions of the Episcopal Church on Galveston Island. Because of this renewed emphasis on our place in the community, the congregation has now surpassed its pre-pandemic levels of worship attendance and financial giving. Though both those parishes are in the Diocese of Texas, they are very different geographically, socioeconomically, and liturgically. In both these situations, though, I have learned that in order to revitalize church communities, leaders must be focused on the Church’s mission to “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.”

As Bishop of West Missouri I would draw upon these experiences to offer wisdom and insight to the clergy and lay leaders of the diocese. I also know, however, that a bishop cannot do this alone. To revitalize communities and focus on the mission of the church, I would also empower and work closely with the diocesan staff, committees, commissions, and ministries to focus on the mission of the Church.

*The Diocese of West Missouri is full of diversity from our politics to our geographic setting, from our congregations' sizes and financial resources to the people who compose those communities. How will you engage in relationship-building as you work across these differences and get to know the diocese?*

The ordination service for a bishop in the *Book of Common Prayer* describes all the ways that a bishop should speak. Bishops are called to proclaim Christ's resurrection, interpret the gospel, and testify to Christ's sovereignty. But bishops are also called to listen and to be faithful pastors. As bishop, I would live fully into this ordination call to listen to the clergy and people of West Missouri, regardless of their politics, geographic setting, or church size. A bishop must be a bishop for the entire diocese, and I would hold this in the forefront of my prayers and ministry.

This, I believe, is what it means for a bishop to guard the unity of the church (BCP, 518). As I pray about the vocation of bishops and from my experience working with bishops, I have seen how bishops guard this unity by reminding the people of the church that they belong to each other, regardless of their ministry context. In this way, a bishop exercises insight, not just oversight (from "God's Mission and a Bishop's Discipleship" by Rowan Williams).

Furthermore, I commit to listening to all people. Already, the Diocese of West Missouri is doing great work around issues of social justice and ministry to people who have been marginalized. Additionally, I would continue the diocesan commitment to growing Hispanic ministry. I believe that we are called to share the good news of Jesus Christ with all people. This can be hard work and will stretch the Diocese to build new relationships. However, I believe that God calls the Church to become a "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples

and languages” (Revelation 7:9). Working toward this vision of the Church would be a priority for my episcopal ministry in West Missouri.

While much of this relationship-building happens during episcopal visitations, committee meetings, and in working with clergy and lay leaders, I know that there is more to the life of the church than that. As bishop, I would build relationships by being present for parish and diocesan celebrations and by supporting churches in times of disaster and crisis. When my family had to evacuate our home during Hurricane Harvey in 2017, my bishops checked on me regularly to make sure we were safe. I am deeply grateful for their support, and that is a lesson in relationship-building that I will carry with me.

However, I have also seen how episcopal ministry is about cultivating relationships across the diocese, not just about building relationships with the bishop. Though the Diocese of West Missouri is diverse, you have already shown your willingness to collaborate and build relationships through shared ministries like regional bookkeepers. In a position of leadership, and in working with the staff and leaders of the diocese, I would continue these efforts and seek other ways for the diverse communities and churches of West Missouri to share their resources, learn from each other, and grow in their relationships.