

*The following is a transcription of the Episcopal Address given by the Rt. Rev. Anne B. Jolly at the 209th Annual Convention of the Diocese of Ohio.*

Good morning, beloved in Christ. It is a joy to be together — to pray, to learn, to celebrate the ways God has been at work among us this past year, and to look to where God may be leading us. Each time we gather, we are reminded that we are not alone —we belong to each other in love, whether we want to be or not, and as my siblings in Christ at St. Andrew’s Cleveland say, there is nothing you can do about that. We are connected by grace, and the love of God continues to move among us in powerful and surprising ways.

Last year, after months of prayer, conversation, and discernment with Diocesan Council, we named our vision: Connected in Beloved Community, we seek to be faithful, healthy, effective, and sustainable sharers of the transformative love of Jesus. That vision continues to guide all we do together — in our congregations, our diocesan ministries, and our relationships beyond our walls. Throughout the day today, we will see how this vision is taking root — how it is shaping the ways we serve, the ways we lead, and the ways we live out our faith in the world. But before we can talk about how we are living this vision, we need to be honest about the world in which we are called to live it.

We live in a deeply polarized time. The public square has become a battleground of right and wrong, “us” and “them.” So often, our identities are defined not by what we stand for, but by whom we stand against. This division doesn’t just separate us from one another — it separates us from God, who commands us to love our neighbors, even our enemies.

At the same time, we are living through a profound cultural shift. Sociologists describe the last century as the Age of Association — a time when people found their identity and belonging through institutions: churches, clubs, civic groups, neighborhoods.

But in recent decades, we have moved into the Age of Authenticity — a world where people seek identity through personal expression rather than community connection. Institutions — including the church — are no longer where people generally look to find meaning.

This new cultural era in which people move away from community has significant impacts, not just on institutions, but also on individuals. As Dwight Zscheile and Blair Pogue note, (the) “individual self is a very shaky foundation upon which to build.”

This is one of the reasons we are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness. Over sixty percent of adults in the U.S. report feeling lonely on a regular basis — and among young adults, that number climbs even higher. The physical toll is staggering - loneliness is as harmful to our health as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day.

In the Episcopal Church and the Diocese of Ohio, these cultural currents meet our own demographic realities.

Average Sunday attendance across The Episcopal Church remains below pre-pandemic levels, even though most churches have experienced a bounce back. ASA is still significantly down over the last decade. The average Episcopal Church has an ASA of 37. In the Diocese of Ohio, our Average ASA in 2024 was well above that at 51.7, while our Median ASA was 40. While I don't believe that ASA is at all the best metric to determine the health and vitality of a faith community, it is one benchmark to watch.

Another important data point is that every church that is experiencing significant growth in TEC is situated in a community that is experiencing significant growth. The demographic projections for our diocesan region project that very few of our counties will experience any growth in the coming decades. Most of our counties are projected to decline.

It is very important for us to name and continue to remind each other that the decline in Sunday worship attendance and in population are not failures of our doing — they are simply the world as it is. We cannot control these forces. But we can decide how we will live faithfully within them. And we CAN and WILL continue to be the church that shares the transformative love of Jesus!

Because the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Ohio is full of extraordinary people with deep faith, resilience, creativity, and JOY. Just look around you — the wisdom is in the room to be present to people who need the love of Christ the most.

### **Faithful Response, Not Despair**

If we imagine that our purpose is to preserve an institution, we will fall into despair. But that is not our call. Our hope and purpose are not in the church's survival — they are in the God who is always bringing new life out of death — a God who transforms the world again and again.

So, our call isn't to save the church — the church is God's body here on earth and God will continue to be alive and present with God's people. Our call is to be faithful to God's commandment to love our neighbors, make disciples, and share Christ's love.

To do this, today's realities leave us no other choice but to be creative about how we continue to share the transformative love of Jesus in northern Ohio.

Last year, we named a hard truth: when most of our energy goes to keeping institutions alive as they were, we have less to give to the mission that gives them life. Our call is not maintenance for its own sake; our call is the Gospel—sharing the love of Jesus and becoming hubs of transformation in our communities.

So, to free people, time, and dollars for the mission of the church, we've been reimagining how we steward our resources. Here are some of the things we have done this year:

- Creative teams. We launched focused task forces to reimagine our resource allocation around properties and finances. These teams, representing faith communities from across the diocese, were charged with creating systemic shifts to help carry the shared

load of operations and administrative tasks—freeing local leaders to focus more fully on mission and ministry. We will hear more about them soon.

- Connected and learned with the wider church. Staff and leaders participated in Trinity Church, New York City's Missional Redevelopment programs, joining a network of dioceses and faith communities exploring how property can serve mission. That partnership is shaping our own next steps and a forthcoming grant proposal to deepen this work in Ohio.
- Put our learning into action. Across the diocese, we've begun discerning long-term, missional uses of our buildings and land—assets that can bless neighbors, not just balance sheets. One example is St. Luke's, Cleveland, which entered a Community Enterprise Cohort to explore creative, community-serving initiatives that align mission and revenue.
- Tended legacy assets. Our Board of Trustees faithfully and intentionally stewards diocesan-held properties. This year that included the sale of the property of the closed parish of St. Alban's—to reduce carrying costs and allow the building to be used for missional purposes serving the community that St. Alban's faithfully served for so long.
  - Stabilized our landmarks. The Board of Trustees also advanced repairs and visioning at St. John's, Ohio City, so this historic space can continue to be a home for justice and refuge. Even as we continue to explore maintenance and renovation options, St. John's continued to live into its long legacy as a gathering place for truth, courage, and community by hosting an Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards event this fall.

You'll hear more from many of these leaders in their own words, but I want to say thank you now—to our staff, the Board of Trustees, the task forces, our lay and clergy leaders, and to so many of you who are making faithful, creative, and courageous decisions to focus on following Jesus.

We undertake all of this specifically to free up our resources to live into the vision and mission of our Diocese and as Christians. In part, we are able to follow the call of Jesus in our communities to be hubs of transformation because of the generosity of people who have gone before us and the generosity of every person and faith community in this room. Together as the Body of Christ we help each other listen, discern, and join God at work in the communities around us. I call upon our Treasurer, Mike Bickerton, from St. Peter's Lakewood, to present and move the adoption of the 2026 Program Budget. He will share this report with us via video due to a longstanding commitment that prevents him from being here.

*At this time, the video from Mike Bickerton plays, and the convention adjourns for lunch.*

I love watching us share in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit through food and conversation! Just as we are doing here, each of our faith communities is working to be a hub of

transformation in their context – lived expressions of our vision unfolding – connecting us to each other and to the people surrounding us.

As we continue to live into our vision, Diocesan Council worked throughout the year to name and articulate the core values of our diocese, so our culture is more visible, and so we can practice it in specific, practical ways.

As you can see, the core values we've named are:

1. Faithful Tradition and Common Worship
2. Belonging and Common Life
3. Discernment and Transformation
4. Courageous Witness and Justice

I'm excited to have these explicitly named. I hope they resonate with you as true to who we are, as well as who we hope to be. We will be using these as guideposts for how we live and serve together.

We were able to use these core values to guide us in a time of intentional discernment about how and when we gather as a diocesan community – because we had been hearing for some time that our patterns and practice of gathering might not serve our needs today.

This time of discernment was a chance to listen deeply to clergy, lay leaders, and staff about what patterns of gathering best support a faithful, healthy, effective, and sustainable diocesan life that helps us live into our vision.

Rhythms of gathering shape how we live, lead, and rest in community. Focusing on developing community and connections through Christ is critical because we are the Body of Christ, connected to each other whether we want to be or not!

The rhythm we discerned focuses on the needs we heard from you: clarity of purpose, common worship, regional connection, rest, and joy:

- Chrism Mass and renewal of vows have moved into Convention, as we did last night, for broader inclusion and accessibility. Everyone has vows to renew, and when we do so together, we are clearer about how we are called to work as a body.
- Regional Gatherings will happen one to two times a year, offering intentional space for shared learning, confirmation, and collaboration across our faith communities. We will announce our 2026 regional gatherings very soon.
- Diocesan Convention will be extended, starting next year, to include an optional pre-convention gathering of learning, connecting, and praying together.
- Clergy Conference remains a vital space for learning, connection, rest, and renewal, and beginning in 2027, may be extended by a day.
- Clergy Day will be optional, while strongly encouraged as a means of spiritual retreat with cherished peers.

- Winter Convocation will no longer occur in its most recent form – making room for the regional gatherings and eliminating the need for the entire diocese to travel in the worst weather month.

We will continue to do FunDays together as part of our larger rhythm of gathering. Fun Days are outward and visible signs of our faith communities as hubs of transformation in their communities. They are the Episcopal Church responding to needs, opening our doors, and forming connections with our neighbors. Not only that, these gatherings are FUN! Joining you in your Fun Days is one of my staff's favorite things to do – we love being with you and bearing witness to your work in your communities. Every staff member attends at least one fun day a year – so make sure to let us know what you are doing so we can come join you!! Take a look at some of the Fun Days we shared this past year:

Our new Rhythm of Gathering reflects who vision is helping us become— a diocese centered in Christ and anchored in worship, learning to balance connection with sustainability, acknowledging the importance of rest for living faithful lives, prioritizing joy, and providing clarity of purpose. We'll keep inviting and incorporating feedback, trusting that the Spirit speaks through the whole Body — and sustains us together in community in these ever-changing times.

We can't over emphasize the need to intentionally come together as the Body of Christ: to gather, to pray, and to rely on each other for encouragement, support, and strength. Practicing our faith together forms us for the courageous witness we are called to — the third core value Diocesan Council named this year.

### **Beloved Community**

Here's how Diocesan Council described our third core value: Inspired by Jesus' example of speaking truth to power, we commit ourselves to advocacy and action for a more just and equitable world. Our witness must work to challenge systems of oppression, confront injustice, and embrace diversity. In speaking with courage and compassion, we embody love in the public square. From generation to generation, we have been shaped by people and communities who show us what faithful action looks like.

As we claim this core value, we also claim the work that comes with it — the work of Becoming Beloved Community. Courageous witness invites us to tell the truth, to remain in relationship even through discomfort, and to address together the realities that keep us from fully living the Gospel.

The Episcopal Church, formed in the Anglican tradition, is uniquely positioned to hold the complexities of living faith in a fractured world. We know how to hold difference in tension — how to kneel side by side, even when we don't agree. Our tradition forms us to hold disagreements with grace and listen to the hearts and souls of the people beside us rather than setting them aside.

In public life today, marginalized communities are increasingly more marginalized and vilified publicly. Whole groups of people are de-humanized by slurs and hate. There are people in our diocese, and likely in this room, who are afraid for their safety. Some of our colleagues and neighbors have moved out of Ohio and even the country in search of a safe place to live. Human nature would prefer to have us ignore this reality or declare it not true because perhaps we can't understand it, but as Christians, we may not ignore our sibling in Christ who tell us this is their reality. And we cannot ignore our responsibility to seek and serve Christ in our siblings.

Part of the truth is that we would rather not do that – it is much easier to settle into echo chambers of belief and understanding rather than sit in the discomfort of the real complexities of life. Yet, we as Christians know we are called to rise above that – to truly love our neighbors, indeed, to love our enemies, and to persist in caring enough to continue in conversations with those with whom we disagree while treating each other as beloved children of God.

Last year at convention I stated our intention to seek a consultant to lead our diocesan community in some of the work of truth-telling, specifically around racism. We need to name the truth of sinful racism that pervades much of our history and still influences our present. We continue to seek the right partner for this work, and it remains a priority.

In order to equip us for this work, the Rev. Canon Rosalind Hughes, our Canon for Beloved Community, worked with leaders to continue redefining our guidelines around anti-racism training and accountability.

A concern we heard last year at convention was about access to and tracking of anti-racism training. To address this concern, Canon Rosalind is creating structures within her office to record and track training and dates for all elected diocesan leaders.

Knowing that access to anti-racism training was a challenge, Canon Rosalind worked with a team of leaders and trainers to design a one-day opportunity to deepen our understanding of and commitment to becoming beloved community. We call this “Every One Beloved.”

We know that Becoming Beloved Community is about far more than a one- or two-day training. We remain committed to telling the truth, working together to end racism and discrimination, and living in Beloved Community here in the Diocese of Ohio. We proclaim a love that heals, reconciles, and unbinds — a love that insists: God loves you. No exceptions.

In a time of fragmentation and fear, we can be communities of belonging and safety, where every person can encounter the transforming love of Jesus. The world needs to know this love, grace, and community exists for them, and the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Ohio can share this with them.

As daunting as this may feel, as our Baptismal Covenant reminds us, we live into our faith “with God’s help.”

God beckons to us to “center down” as Howard Thurman says, into God’s deep well of love. Silence, one of the sources of transformation, is one of the key ways scripture tells us we can

draw closer to God, particularly in community. As the spirit who binds us together weaves between us, we encounter Jesus.

I'm going to invite us to enter into holy silence together now. Feet on ground. Comfortable posture. Eyes closed or gentle gaze. When I ring the bowl, we will enter into several minutes of silence where we can be still and know that God is God and we are not – and give thanks for that. I will ring the bowl again to bring us out of this sacred silence.

*Transition to silence.*

Now, grounded in that silence and re-centered on the Spirit's presence, we turn to the work that helps shape our common life.

### **Reimagining/Equipping Faith Communities & Leaders**

Last year at Convention we talked about the purpose of the church to Gather, Transform, and Send disciples into the world. We acknowledged that we have to continually consider how God is calling us to live as Christians in today's world, and equip leaders and faith communities to live into that call.

This is key to who we are in DOhio. That is why one of our diocesan core values is Discernment and Transformation.

In the words of our Council:

“We seek to discern with curiosity and courage the voice of God, the movement of the Spirit, and the needs of one another in our lives and our communities. Our discernment invites us to ask bold questions, hold silence, honor complexity, and to name truth with love. Discernment forms and transforms us. Through our transformation, both individually and collectively, we pursue wisdom and clarity, trusting that God is always calling us to and new life.”

Discernment is the wellspring of practicing our faith in community. This takes many forms, both individual and corporate. We will look at how we are working together to equip faith communities and leaders to discern, learn, and serve together.

Our Canon for Leadership Development, Russ Tripi, and our Commission on Ministry have revamped how we teach and practice discernment for leadership in the diocese of Ohio.

### **Ministry Discernment Day**

Because faith community leadership is much more than just ordained ministers, it was a top priority to structure a discernment process in community for all people who desire to find more clarity about God's call in their lives.

This begins with Ministry Discernment Day, which is a day of learning about discernment and retreat to sit and listen to God. We're seeing more people discerning how to live out their

baptismal ministry in the church and in the world, and it's critical that we offer support and structure for everyone. Discernment Day now has multiple tracks where people can explore lay leadership, diaconal ministry, or the ministry of the priesthood.

Discernment is also crucial in our faith communities, and times of transition are particularly well-positioned to engage in discernment and transformation. This is part of continually listening for God's call, God's purpose for that particular faith community at that time, what is happening in the neighborhood around them, and how God is calling them to be in relationship with their neighbors. Because of the many complexities of the world and society in which we live that we have talked about today, an adaptive and flexible approach to transitions is necessary.

There are a few other realities about clergy availability that make faith community leadership more complicated. Data gathered by transition ministers in the Episcopal church tell us that a clergy shortage continues throughout the church. That shortage is felt most acutely in part-time positions, which are on the rise throughout the country. There are far more communities looking for part-time clergy than there are clergy willing to work part-time. In this reality, we find new opportunities for leadership and ministry as we try new things without being afraid of failing.

This year, Canons Audra and Jessie, and our Missioner for Innovation and Transition, Aaron Gerlach, have built processes for discernment for faith communities in transition that offer many different ways to discern their call. Next month, they will train a team of facilitators who will walk alongside these faith communities in their discernment. Several other dioceses are interested in how we are working together to be the church in the world today.

This year, several of our faith communities in DOhio completed faithful discernment about the joys of partnering in shared ministry this year and are beginning to live those out together. They partner in many areas of ministry, including employing a priest who serves both faith communities.

Join me in celebrating: Epiphany, Euclid and St. Andrew, Mentor; and St. Matthew's Ashland and Grace, Mansfield, as they help us all learn new ways of sharing leadership. One of the wonderful things about these arrangements is the intentionality of lay leadership throughout the ministry areas, including worship. Our catechism describes the ministry of lay people as "representing Christ and his Church, bearing witness to him in the world, and participating in Christ's work of reconciliation."

Canon Russ is working on creating more structures and opportunities to form lay leaders for all areas of ministry. He and Father John Drymon worked together to train leaders in the shared ministries, and to re-work our worship leader training, including training manuals for clergy to use to train worship leaders in other faith communities.

As we continue to expand our leadership formation opportunities, Canon Audra is working with leaders around the diocese to think of new ways to share the good news of Jesus' transforming

love outside the walls of our churches. This takes the form of monthly innovation calls, regional gatherings, and one to one conversation. Additionally, she is laying the groundwork for how we can create new communities of faith.

All of this, of course, requires the wisdom, creativity, and energy of teams of people in our diocese, and collaboration with leaders from other dioceses working to be creative. It also takes financial resources. A beautiful example of resurrection grace is that money from closed churches will help fund discerning and forming new Episcopal communities, as well as other ministries of transformation throughout the diocese. We are grateful for how the decades of ministry and prayer of these communities will live on in new communities and initiatives.

### **Stories of Transformation Across the Diocese**

And there are some wonderful stories of transformative ministries happening throughout DOhio! I want to highlight just a few examples of how YOU are making a difference as hubs of transformation and hope in your communities.

- St. Matt's, Toledo - The courage to remain and transform, AND Body of Christ coming together to support them.
- St. Tim's, Perrysburg - Recently renovated the old rectory to relocate their Clothesline ministry, a volunteer-run free clothing ministry serving the greater Perrysburg area.
- Church of our Saviour, Akron - Summit Fresh Mobile Market with the mission to sell fresh, healthy, and affordable groceries to communities designated as food deserts, to empower every individual with agency to access nutritious food, and to promote equity in health outcomes leading to enhanced well-being across resource restricted communities.
- Old Trinity, Tiffin Community Kitchen - A partnership between Old Trinity and multiple community businesses and organizations created a hub for healthy living, culinary training, and connection through food.
- Ship To Shore, Redeemer, Lorain - Redeemer, Lorain is deeply embedded in their community and is constantly responding to needs they hear for food, art, community, and connection. Most recently, Fr. Alex partnered with a few other committed people and opened Ship to Shore, a coffee shop, bookstore, music store, and community building hub. It points people to Redeemer and is committed to giving any profits to the church and other community serving organizations.
- Bellevue's Blessing Box and Angel Wings - St. Paul's, a completely lay led faith community, is actively involved in their community and has many creative and faithful ways to be a hub of transformation. They have a chocolate and cheeseball business called The Candy Depot. They also have a large "blessing box" outside their doors that is stocked by the community for the community. When they put a call out on Facebook, it fills up immediately. And they most recently had angel wings painted on their building as a sign of joy and hope for people to connect with them and find their inner angel.
- Church Square Church Fest – St. John's, Cuyahoga Falls is situated on a city block with two other churches, and they have been working together for over a year to be a hub of

transformation. They name their joint purpose as, “This initiative makes disciples by reimagining church property as sacred space that serves community needs—housing the vulnerable, offering gathering space, and sustaining local life through the arts and food. It transforms passive facilities into active, mission-centered environments, modeling a public witness of collaborative Christian presence.”

- College for Congregational Development

And this is just a sampling of the amazing ways that YOU are sharing the transformative love of Jesus in your communities!

One of the ways we continue to equip lay leaders and faith communities to make disciples and be hubs of transformation is through The College for Congregational Development. The College continues to be a central pillar of our work together by equipping us to have ongoing discernment, critical conversations, accountability to our mission, and a common language for how we both assess and live into our call.

Two years in, CCD is shaping creative, resilient leaders who return home ready to help their communities thrive. The Rev. Leah Romanelli DeJesus leads the college here in DOhio, and I’m tremendously grateful for her dedication and ministry. Leah, along with the Revs Robin Woodberry and Alex Martin are all accredited trainers for the College and will serve at our weeks, as well as sessions in other dioceses, expanding our knowledge and network of practitioners of faith.

The College equips lay and clergy alike – and is most effective when teams from faith communities come together. The more people who learn these skills and become practitioners of them, the easier it is for us to focus our efforts on being the church, making disciples, and sharing the transformative love of Jesus. This is the Body of Christ at work in DOhio!

The College gives us tools, or Models, through which we can view our contexts and work towards being more faithful, healthy, effective, and sustainable. While the primary way to learn these models is to attend the college week-long sessions, we are also working to share models in many ways throughout the year – including here at Convention! So, like last year, we will know learn and work with a model from the College that helps us explore how the Holy Spirit is present in our faith communities, and how we can make more space for transformation.

I call upon The Rev. Alex Martin, St. Barnabas, Bay Village, to teach the Sources of Transformation model.

I’ve been teaching this model at my visitations throughout the year, so some of you have already engaged with this material. And now, we will work together to engage with this model, and reflect on what this looks like in our own faith communities.

Conversations like this, centered around deepening our spiritual lives and equipping our faith communities to share the transformative love of Jesus, are the heart of what we do together as the Diocese of Ohio.

Each table will move through these three questions that you can see on the screen and on page 72 of your Convention Handbook.

1. Naming the Spirit's Presence – Where do you notice the Holy Spirit most active in your faith community? (Think about the Sources of Transformation: Prayer & Worship, Study & Learning, Action, Life in Community).
2. Share an illustration or story.
  - a. Pick one Source to focus on.
3. Attending to the Spirit's Invitation – Where might the Holy Spirit be trying to get our attention in another Source of Transformation?
  - a. How could our current strength help us be more attentive there?
4. Returning & Sharing – How will you bring this conversation back to your community? Ideas could include:
  - a. Share with vestry/leadership.
  - b. Write a short reflection for newsletter/letter.
  - c. Hold a follow-up conversation with your congregation.

We'll have 45 minutes to talk at our tables. After that, each table will be able to share your conversations with another table, and then we will have an opportunity to report back to the whole Convention.

Now, we're going to widen the circle a bit. You'll have about 20 minutes to share your reflections with a faith community other than your own—someone sitting near you.

Take some time to tell each other what surfaced in your conversations—where you're seeing the Holy Spirit at work, and what invitations you're discerning. Conversation and listening are two important sources of transformation – when we hear other people talk about their lives of faith, our own faith journeys are expanded. Believe it or not, this is evangelism!

Before you wrap up your conversations, take two minutes to exchange prayer requests from each community, so that you can pray for one another throughout the coming year.

Prayer works—we know this to be true! Last year, faith communities committed to praying for each other after Convention—and you did. Many faith communities included each other in their weekly Prayers of the People. What a beautiful witness to our shared life in Christ.

So please, go ahead and find another table, introduce yourselves, and share what you've been hearing and noticing.

This time of sharing allows us, as a whole Convention, to hear from one another—to celebrate how the Holy Spirit is moving among us and to gather inspiration for our own ministries and communities.

As always, this is optional. All may, some should, none must. As we listen, let's do so with gratitude and curiosity for how God is at work across the Diocese of Ohio.

What a gift it is to hear the Spirit speaking through so many voices — the hopes, the ideas, the courage we're hearing around these tables are the seeds of transformation taking root among us. The more aware we are of God's active presence in our lives, the easier it is to join God in transformative ministry, and to share God's love. This is the foundation of evangelism!

And DOhio — I see God at work everywhere I look — in your faith communities, in this room, and in each of you. I hope you see and feel that too. The energy, grace, and joy in this room is palpable.

I am so grateful — for this diocese, for each of you, for the countless ways you show up to love God and neighbor. Your steady faithfulness, your creativity, your resilience — they warm my heart and inspire me.

Today I'm especially grateful for my staff, and all the volunteers who have worked tirelessly behind the scenes all year to hold space for us to gather, be transformed, and sent out to do as God has called us to do.

### **Looking Ahead: Charting the Next Chapter**

The Spirit's invitation is clear: to keep finding and holding space for transformation to take root. Each of you are and will be doing that in the coming year — and I want to name some ways that we will be following what we hear God calling us to at a diocesan level.

We will be listening and discerning about how our mission area structure serves or doesn't serve our mission today. We will be exploring how neighboring congregations can collaborate more deeply in shared mission — so we live more fully as the body of Christ and not just knees, elbows, earlobes, and belly buttons.

We will pull together groups of people to focus on faithful, engaging, and meaningful ways to worship in our tradition so that faith communities with and without clergy leadership can be confident and equipped for weekly worship together. There are many ways to experience the Holy Spirit in worship as we all know — and we want to make sure we are listening to how she is moving among us.

As we have already named today, we realize the absolute necessity of equipping both lay and ordained leaders for the work of transformation. To this end, we plan to launch a formation school to equip lay leaders and deacons in DOhio for the ministry God has set before them.

We all know that there are countless people in DOhio who do not go to church and do not experience the transformative love of Jesus. This year we will be listening and watching for where new ministries and partnerships might emerge. It is a significant part of our ministry to plant new communities and see how the Holy Spirit flows.

To further enhance how we come together as the Body of Christ, fully dependent on each other, we will be developing regional cohorts and gatherings to support and accompany faith communities across the diocese. We are created for community, and we can find a

All of this is about making space — space for the Spirit to strengthen and breathe new life into our shared mission.

Beloved, the task before us is not to save the church — Jesus has already done the saving. Our task is to join God in the work already happening around us.

We are Christians — not churchians. Our faith is in God, not in human institutions.

We must let go of anxiety about survival and instead become disciples- dedicated and faithful learners — who help others discover that they are loved beyond measure.

When we are able to shift our attentions and anxieties from guarding what has been - to nurturing what is being born, we become hubs of hope and transformation.

In a world aching for connection, the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Ohio embodies community. In a world starving for meaning, we offer the Bread of Life.

You are AMAZING. Truly. Look at you. I hope you are inspired by the stories you have heard from each other — the way you see the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit moving and guiding us again and again to the loving arms of Jesus. God is doing amazing things in DOhio through your lives, ministries, and witness. I'm so proud to be your bishop.

Our unshakable faith will sustain us as we continue to share, in every corner of this diocese, the simple, powerful truth that transforms everything: God loves you. No exceptions. This truth, God's love, and your presence really do change the world.