

## Convention Address 2023

I have split my address into two parts: This first part is to introduce the work put into the 2024 diocesan budget and the Plan for Ministry that our Treasurer Tom Kokjer will present. This afternoon, I will offer the second part of this address outlining how far we have come and where I think we still need to go in this next year.

The Diocese of West Missouri owes great thanks to Fr. Isaac Petty for his work on all aspects of this budget. After an initial *reimagining the 2024 Plan for Ministry* meeting with members of the Finance Committee last December, Fr. Isaac and I sat down at my kitchen table a few days later and worked out a timeline and a plan of action. This entailed stripping the budget to zero and soliciting budget requests from the entire diocese. The request for budget proposals was sent out on December 28 to everyone on our email list.

You'll remember at last year's convention we did some brainstorming on the revised mission and vision statements developed by Diocesan Council. At their annual retreat in February of this year, the Diocesan Council and Standing Committee members "shored up" the mission and vision statements by adding four pillars to support them:

***Proclaiming the Good News, forming disciples, serving others, and striving for justice.***

Members of the Standing Committee and the Diocesan Council were gathered into four "pillar teams," and each group listed desired outcomes related to each pillar.

Once the budget requests all came in – requests totaling more than 6 million dollars – each was assigned to a pillar group related to the request. Fr. Isaac was key in helping sort the requests. The pillar groups reviewed each request and made recommendations to Diocesan Council.

The budget planning team – which consisted of Fr. Isaac, our Treasurer Tom Kokjer, our Finance Administrator Ron Weil, and me – met frequently to review progress with the budget and to make suggestions to Diocesan Council and the Finance Committee. Two additional pillars were added to round out the budget: ***how we practice God's economy*** and ***how we support this important work***. Special thanks go to Tom Kokjer and Ron Weil for their work, especially Ron, who is the king of Excel spreadsheets.

Diocesan Council decided not to expand the Diocesan staff because that may not be the direction your next bishop wants to go. This helped reduce a very large budget gap down to about \$500,000 – still a fairly large gap on its own. In our August meeting, Diocesan Council worked hard to bring that gap down to a reasonable level (below \$50,000). The Finance Committee then hammered it down to a balanced budget.

Alongside this budget work, other committees were formed to look at the assessment levels for congregations, as well as clergy compensation. Diocesan Council received

monthly updates and made decisions that drove changes to the assessment and compensation levels. Those conversations were deep and rich – and all the way through, the process was facilitated by Fr. Isaac.

Also along the way, the deans – the Very Rev. Cn. Robin James, the Very Rev. Chandler Jackson, and the Very Rev. Tim Coppinger, who serve on the Diocesan Council AND Finance Committee – were fully informed of every aspect of the budgeting process. They brought the draft budgets to their Deanery Council meetings for your feedback and review. Your comments were brought back to Diocesan Council and were discussed at great length.

All this is to say, Fr. Isaac, Tom Kokjer, Ron Weil, the Diocesan Council, the Standing Committee, the special Budget Committee and the subcommittees on assessments and compensation, along with the Finance Committee and Human Resource Committee, worked very hard this year to bring you a budget from scratch that reflects the mission and vision your diocesan leaders discerned.

I was asked by a member of Diocesan Council if we were going to do this every year – and the answer is NO. Zero-based budgeting is a herculean effort that is at most done every ten years. The budget will be reviewed annually, with tweaks and changes made to it, until the next time zeroing it out as necessary. I also want to be clear that we still have ALL the budget requests as they were originally presented. These will be brought out, dusted off, and reviewed by Diocesan Council as we begin to discuss the 2025 budget.

My brothers and sisters, my siblings in Christ, I want to share with you that I sat down the other day and started writing down all **we** have done in these last 23 ½ months. I looked at that list and thought, Holy Guacamole! That is a LOT of work done – but it wasn't done by me alone. Many people with many responsibilities – both paid staff and a sea of volunteers – lay and ordained – made all this happen.

We spent 2023 working together – *pondering anew what the Almighty can do*. We looked back at our missional DNA. We looked at our past to reclaim who we are – a missional people – but we did not get stuck in simply looking backwards.

We moved forward to the point where we could truly *ponder anew what the Almighty can do* among us. I shared with you at last year's convention that my goal is to rebuild trust, to restore effective, healthy communication styles, to put guidelines in place where needed for our common life together, to visit all of you as often as I can, to be available to you as your Bishop Provisional, and to share the love of Christ with all of you. Building on the work begun last year, during 2023:

- We continued to break down silos that limited communication and stifled creative, collaborative mission and ministry by looking at the diocese as a whole – not just its parts. Hence the herculean effort on the budget, the Plan for Ministry and the review of assessments and clergy compensation. I can tell you

– from the miles that I have put on my car, the hours of Zoom and in-person meetings of the committees and commissions – I can tell you that those silos are coming down.

- We also worked to build back trust between congregations and the bishop, between the clergy and the bishop, and among the clergy themselves. How? By modeling that there is nothing we can't say to each other in love. I knew earlier this year that we were really making progress when a clergy person came into my office and had a very frank conversation with me about something they thought I had done. I knew it was hard for that clergy person to come to me with this burden on their heart. Our discussion was frank, open, and honest. I cherish the fact that this trust had been built up and that we could not only talk but be reconciled.
- With deeper trust, we worked hard on communicating directly rather than triangulating. This has resulted in more people having open and frank conversations, with me and with each other. This is so much healthier than smiling sweetly and offering someone your best Midwest Nice ... and then talking about that person behind their back.
- We worked to make committees and commissions more proactive in their work. We are also having each committee and commission work on an onboarding document for new members.
- I've invested time in pastoral care of our clergy and lay leaders. This continues to be a priority for me while I am here with you.

There will be times when the decisions I make will not be popular with some of you. Please know that I make no major decision without taking it to prayer and seeking the wise council of those around me, especially our Chancellor, the Vice President of Diocesan Council, and the President of the Standing Committee. Also, if appropriate, the Standing Committee itself, the Diocesan Council, the Deans, and the staff.

Are we done with this work? No, no we are not. These are ongoing issues that we must always be mindful of and not fall back into bad patterns. However, we have made great strides forward. Hence, in conversation with the Standing Committee, we concluded that you all are ready to start a search for your next Bishop Diocesan for this absolute gem of a diocese. Thank you for working with me and with each other, to the glory of God.

In case you missed an announcement, I want to make you aware of some staff updates:

- With your approval of the 2023 budget at last year's convention, we increased **the Rev. Chas Marks'** hours to half time at the beginning of the year. This has truly been a tremendous help in clergy transitions and congregational development. Fr. Chas has worked tirelessly with our congregations to ensure that they not only feel supported but are equipped to call a new priest to their community. For those congregations trying to decide what they can or cannot afford or how they want to move forward, Fr. Chas has been a strong resource. Fr. Chas is also leading the ***Beginning Well*** program which I will explain in a bit.
- We welcomed **the Rev. David Wilcox** as our Youth Missioner. It's noteworthy that the work of developing a new job description and conducting the search was done by the Youth Commission, headed by Fr. Joe Pierjok. They did a fantastic

job! Fr. David hit the ground running and has already led several youth events and has been out visiting congregations talking about this work.

- **Elaine Gilligan**, our Diocesan HR guru and Finance Assistant worked tirelessly with the cumbersome transition to the new Safeguarding program for our churches and institutions. She continues to keep up to date on HR issues, helping our clergy and congregations sort out challenges.
- **Ron Weil** our Finance Director has been tasked with ensuring every church has an audit done this year. This is another herculean task given the fact that a good number of churches have not had an audit done in years. It is required by Canon that each church have an audit done every year, by the way. Ron himself has gone out to do audits for congregations and provides a letter to them with recommendations. This will become an annual occurrence for the diocese.
- We hired **Zach Phillips** as our Assistant Communications Director. A few months later, Gary Allman, our Communications Director, decided to retire, and we wished him well in his new chapter. Zach then stepped into Gary's role and, with our Communications Committee, took on the task of revamping our diocesan website, our logo, and our social media. We combed through all the policies and forms on our old website to ensure that only recent and relevant policies, procedures, and forms were moved onto the new website. **Our new website was launched on XXXXX to positive reviews by so many of you.**
- We wished **the Rev. Charles Everson** well as he left his position as Vocations Missioner after being elected Rector of the Church of the Atonement in Chicago; and we welcomed **the Rev. Anne Kyle** as our new Vocations Missioner. Mtr. Anne will be working closely with the Commission on Ministry as we continue the work of revamping our vocations process.
  - Of note is that this revamped vocation process has resulted in the formation of cohorts of ordinands and clergy who are new to the diocese being gathered under the *Beginning Well* program – a program developed by the Education subcommittee of the Commission on Ministry. I am grateful, especially, to the Rev. Steven King, Anne Rainey and the Rev. Deacon Beck Schubert for this program getting off the ground. This program is designed to help newly ordained and those clergy who are new to the diocese transition well to ordained ministry.
  - The revised vocations process has also helped with ensuring we celebrate only two groups of ordinations a year – one to the diaconate, one to the presbyterate – and no ordinations are being done at Diocesan Convention.
- Just last month, we wished **Kim Snodgrass** well as she retired from her position leading spiritual formation. She has done so for many years and we are so grateful for her work starting with the youth program. The Spiritual Formation Committee will be taking on this work as a group, facilitated by **the Rev. David Wilcox**.
- **The Rev. Jose Palma** has continued his work as our Latino Missioner and has been in conversation with various congregations to look at starting Spanish speaking ministries in their communities. He has mapped out where Latino communities are growing.

- It goes without saying that **Emily Davenport** has had to put her roller skates on to keep up with not only my schedule, but all the projects and programs we are working on. As always, Emily is not only on top of it all, but is a source of great wisdom – always with a smile on her face.
- Every member of the staff now has an up-to-date job description and performance plan. Performance evaluations will take place at the end of November. The best news is that we have a “top drawer” staff who all work well together and for you. I feel blessed by every one of them, and I value their insights and their work.

We also came together as a diocese to celebrate, learn, and pray.

- We held our first annual service honoring the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. God willing and his health improving, Presiding Bishop Michael Curry will be with us at our celebration of the life and witness of Dr. King Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 in the Cathedral nave.
- Absalom Jones celebration
- 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Deanery Picnics – I am grateful to Rachael Orth for this good work, working closely with the deans.
- Diversity Workshops.
- Diocesan Council and Standing Committee Retreat.
- Joint Staff Retreat.
- Retreat with our amazing Deacons!
- Our youth participated in EYE (Episcopal Youth Event), Mega Camp and had game nights.
- Clergy Renewal of Vows.
- First PRIDE Eucharists.
- BE SMART events for gun safety awareness thanks to the Peace and Justice Committee.
- Access for All God’s Children workshop.
- Our Campus Ministry committee started podcasts to explain the Episcopal Church to college students.
- My husband Steve has been working with a team of clergy spouses to brainstorm and put together events for them here in the diocese, including the recently completed clergy spouse retreat and gatherings at Convention.
- Stewardship Workshops.
- Doctrine of Discovery Workshop lead by the Rev. Brad Hauff, Indigenous Missioner for The Episcopal Church.
- Series of three talks on the Desert Mystics was offered in the Kansas City metro a few months ago by the Rev. Cn. Brad Karelius. This will be repeated in Joplin and Springfield the first weekend of December.
- Women’s Retreats.
- Celebration of La Virgen de Guadalupe.
- Liturgy of Lament at the lynching site in Springfield. We have been invited to St. Joseph to do a similar event at the site of a lynching there later this year.

- Three of us traveled and were part of the national gathering of the Union of Black Episcopalians in Montgomery, Alabama.
- And we planned this convention starting late last year to come up with the theme and work with all the moving parts a convention needs to be attended to.

I continue to be humbled and honored to travel around this diocese seeing all of you. That is no small thing, by the way. Each congregation I've visited is an integral member of our diocesan family, regardless of its size. Plus, honestly, it's no small thing making the time to get there, and be with you, and build the relationships that bind us together. I use my time in the car to call people I need to catch up with here in the diocese, and to listen to audio books, by the way. Here's what a year around the diocese (from right after last year's convention to the end of this year) looks like:

- Trinity, Independence
- Calvary, Sedalia,
- St. Andrew's, Kansas City,
- St. James, Springfield,
- St. Alban's, Bolivar,
- Resurrection, Blue Springs,
- Grace and Holy Trinity, Kansas City,
- St. Luke's, Excelsior Springs,
- St. Anne's, Lee's Summit,
- Grace, Carthage,
- St. John's, Springfield,
- St. Matthew's, Raytown,
- St. Augustine's, Kansas City
- Christ Church, Lexington
- Grace, Chillicothe
- St. Philip's, Joplin
- St. Mark's, Kimberling City,
- St. Nicholas, Noel
- Good Shepherd, Kansas City
- St. Mary's, Savannah
- St. Philip's, Trenton
- St. Paul's, Lee's Summit
- St. Oswald's, Skidmore
- Christ Church, Warrensburg
- Shepherd of the Hills, Branson
- St. Matthew's, Ozark
- Christ Church, Springfield
- Christ Church, Boonville
- All Saint's, Nevada
- St. Mary's, Fayette
- Christ Church, St. Joseph

- Grace, Liberty
- Trinity, Lebanon
- St. Peter's, Harrisonville,
- St. George's Camdenton
- St. Mary's, Kansas City
- St. John's, Neosho
- St. Paul's, Kansas City.
- St. Mary Magdalene, Belton
- St. Paul's, Clinton
- St. Michael's, Independence
- St. Stephen's, Monett

I'll see the following churches next year as I visited them in 2022:

- Redeemer, Kansas City
- St. Peter and All Saints, Kansas City
- St. Thomas A Becket, Cassville
- Transfiguration, Mountain Grove, and
- All Saints West Plains

I've also presided over a few Requiem Eucharists, held outside-of-Sunday morning confirmation services, installed a few new rectors, responded to every Ember Day letter, celebrated many congregational anniversaries and festivals, met with vestries and bishop's committees, ordained deacons and priests, made dozens and dozens and dozens of pastoral calls and visits, been with you for social events and retreats. In addition I attended board meetings for St. Luke's on the Plaza, Bishop Spencer Place and St. Luke's Hospital system. I've also participated in the councils of the Episcopal Church serving as a Trustee of the Church Pension Fund, as Secretary to the House of Bishops and as Bishop Visitor for the Anamchara Fellowship.

And with all the spare time in a bishop's calendar, I've loved visiting some interesting sites along the way.

- This past year I visited:
  - Where Jesse James was raised and where he was killed.
  - The tribute to Walter Cronkite in St. Joseph.
  - Laura Ingall Wilder's homes
  - The Gateway Arch
  - The Missouri State Fair
  - The Thomas Hart Benton home and studio
  - Brown vs. Board of Education Museum,
  - The sites of various battles throughout the diocese as well as many historic markers and parks.
- I've been able to see events at the Starlight, the Kaufman Performing Arts Center, the Folly Theater, the Music Hall and listen to live jazz at the Majestic.
- I was able to play miniature golf at the Nelson Atkins.

- I have yet to see a Chiefs or a Royals game in person, however. No pressure!
- I have continued to enjoy some amazing food, and no, I still can't bring myself to eat deviled eggs.
- And I have gotten turned around and lost in various, well, interesting KCMO and KCK neighborhoods.

That's what I've been up to. Actually, that's what we've ALL been up to. But we are far from done. *Ponder anew what the Almighty can do!* The Almighty has done much here in these past 23 months because so many of you have stepped up to participate in commissions and committees or volunteer for one-time events – I can't begin to name you all because we would be here for a VERY long time. It is an honor and great privilege to be your Bishop Provisional. I look forward to our work together next year so that you can elect at next year's convention a Bishop to continue to love you, guide you, and serve alongside you.