

Bishop's Address
Diocese of West Missouri Diocesan Convention 2025
The Right Reverend Amy Dafler Meaux

Hello Diocese of West Missouri! I am so happy to be here. Just about a year ago, I was sitting on pins and needles wondering about the future. Now, here we are, in the future. It is absolutely wonderful! I am grateful for your trust in me; and I love being the bishop of West Missouri.

Thank you for the love and care you show for my family. Our children are all settling well into their new places. We are happy in our new home and community in Lees Summit. Most of all, we feel settled and that is a real blessing.

I am often asked what it's like being a bishop. Do I like it? Am I happy? To be honest, I never imagined that ministry was about happiness or what I liked. Rather, I hoped that ministry would bring me close to Jesus. This is exactly what I have found as the Bishop of West Missouri: our shared ministry brings me very close to Jesus. Our life together is, for me, a revelation of God's ongoing redeeming activity in creation..

Since February, I have put almost 22,000 miles on my car. Most of those miles are logged between Lees Summit and the rest of our Diocese. My family has chosen a quiet neighborhood near Hwy 150 and I-49. From there, I can easily travel to Harrisonville, Branson, and, one day soon, West Plains. It is just as easy to make my way to St. Oswalds in the fields, Trenton, and Booneville. I've even been to Neosho and soon I'll visit Noel and Nevada. The best part of the drive is the incredible scenery our diocese has to offer. I can't tell you how many times I choose NOT to pull off to the side of the road to take a picture (because I WILL be late). West Missouri holds some of the most beautiful places in God's creation.

When I'm in our churches, I discover joy and delight in the Lord. I witness you caring and loving one another, sharing the love of Jesus in your community. At St. Alban's in Bolivar, we laughed as they shared stories of Sunday school. The people of Trinity, Lebanon delight in sharing how they care for their neighbors. We even laugh in worship, sacramental laughter: an outward reminder of the divine joy that binds us to one another. Let us always remember that we love each other; we care about each other; we delight in God's presence in our midst.

There are also some hard truths. Many of our communities are small in numbers. There's just no getting around it. This isn't all our communities. Yet, when some of us face this challenge, we all face this challenge. Some of us are facing difficult financial realities: living month to month makes it hard to imagine a different future. This isn't all our communities. Yet, when some of us face this challenge, we all face this challenge. And what about our property? One of our clergy returned home from clergy conference to discover a myriad of property problems, including the

death of an HVAC (God bless our A/Cs and furnaces). Which one of our churches isn't facing some challenges. The question is: how will we face them; where is our hope?

Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a man who did such amazing things and said such wonderful things that crowds of people followed him everywhere he went. Sometimes they asked him about the kingdom of God: when would it come; what would it be like; how would they know it had arrived? And Jesus said,

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. (Lk 13: 18-19)

A mustard seed, not a jewel or grand city, Jesus uses the "smallest of seeds" to describe the kingdom of God. I wonder what this image has to teach us about who we are and God's presence in our midst.

Consider the mustard seed. It is so small that if I told you I was holding one now you'd have to get really close - too close - to see it. What does a mustard seed need to grow: fertile soil, appropriate amounts of water, and the right kind of weather. The seed is at the mercy of the gardener, who must find the right place and season for growth. Frankly, the only thing the seed **can** do is grow as best it can within its circumstances.

Let's imagine it does grow. The mustard seed will only ever become one thing: a tree. The tree has its uses: mustard, of course. And, I suppose, if needed, as lumber, charcoal or firewood. This is where and when this parable, the story of the mustard seed, has its greatest impact. The mustard seed has potential beyond our imagination: it can house birds, provide shade, and more. When looking at a seed, we might imagine the plant it can become. What is beyond the scope of our own knowledge? When we look at the seed, do we imagine more than mustard?

Consider our churches. What do we see? What do we need in order to become who God made us to be? Is it possible we are made for more than what we can see, or know, or imagine? What if the kingdom of God is like a church of three members that hosts Compline on the radio every Sunday evening? What if the kingdom of God is an intergenerational community who minister with one another? What if the kingdom of God is like a church where half the members are unsheltered and have no income? What if the kingdom of God is making us into something new?

I have no doubt we are the kingdom of God, right here, right now. We may resemble the smallest of seeds; and we are also places of respite and nourishment for our people. We may have little control, if any, over the resources available to us for growth and vitality. Yet, we will continue to

be the Episcopal Church in West Missouri. Frankly, the only thing we can do is be the church God calls us to be no matter our circumstance.

We have some hard work to do. Like a seed breaking its shell, putting forth a stem and leaves, breaking through the soil, we must face the challenges set before us. Like the seed, we must be ready to be transformed by God's vision for us.

Over the next year, we will build on the strategies in place to steward our resources towards the future, holding the tension between what we need now and investing in our future. We must discern the *right order* for growth. Over the next year, we will build a strategy and a plan as we move towards the future. This includes church planting or re-planting, financial sustainability, and Christian education of all ages. We may hit the pause button on some ministries, slow down a bit, and evaluate our option. We will take risks and make some mistakes.

The good news is we have all the time we need. There is no deadline or final goal. Our purpose is to be rebuilt and redeemed by God's activity in our midst. What matters most is our faithfulness, that we keep being who God made us to be: the Episcopal church in the Diocese of West Missouri.

Over the last six months, we have begun a relationship that, I hope, will last a long time. Thank you for trusting me and welcoming me so easily! Over the next year, I look forward to the ways we will continue to get to know one another. I imagine there will be opportunities for us to strategize and plan for the future. There will be more discernment committees, more leadership retreats, and more budget meetings. I hope we will look back on this season as a time when we stood on tiptoe ready to witness all God is doing in our midst. For now, it is enough to remember that we are in this together. From this small seed of hope, our church, we are building a future where we will love God and our neighbor with our whole lives. Thanks be to God!