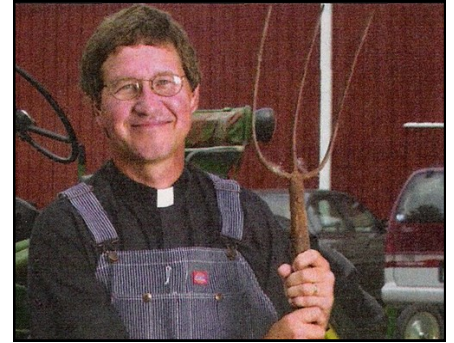


Address to the 128th Annual Council of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Virginia

The Rt. Rev. Susan B. Haynes

February 28, 2020

As a priest in Northern Indiana, I kept my sanity by going to the farm. Along with other clergy, I was part of a wellness program called “Tending Soil and Soul.” Known as Hope CSA, the farm is owned and operated by The Rev. Jeff Hawkins, a retired Lutheran pastor who left parish ministry to return to the farming done by generations in his family. He started the clergy wellness program when he realized that tending people and communities in the church is a lot like tending flocks and gardens on the farm, and that clergy would benefit from this knowledge. A typical day in the program runs like this: we arrive around 8 am and assist Pastor Jeff with farm chores. We gather eggs, feed the chickens, feed the pigs, and check on the cows to make sure they have water. Mid-morning we break for coffee and devotions. After the break we might engage in a longer project like planting potatoes, weeding the beans, re-orienting the chicken’s fencing, shoveling compost onto the asparagus, or constructing a new hen house. At lunch, we would gather around his big kitchen table and enjoy a full meal made from farm animals and plants. After lunch, we had a mandatory two hour rest period in various recliners in the house or hammocks under a tree. The last two hours of the day were devoted to conversation and reflection around assigned reading and around how our engagement on the farm is a lot like our engagement in the parish.



Pastor Jeff Hawkins of Hope CSA

Jeff liked to joke that the letters CSA in his farm’s name stood for “Clergy Sustaining Agriculture” because of how hard we all worked. Frankly, I think he has a brilliant business model. I mean we paid *him* to come to his farm to work. How many of you run a business where your employees pay to be your workers? The farm was my life-line to sanity. The hard work and connection to soil, plants and animals was restorative and grounding. I tried never to miss a day on the farm. The connections between tending flocks and gardens and tending parishioners and parishes were obvious; and I loved talking about those connections. For example, I understood that healthy, well-watered soil will sustain beautiful, productive plants just as souls, healthy and well-watered by prayer, will produce spiritual fruits. Sometimes, though, the connections weren’t so obvious. One of the first chores Jeff likes to have new people in the program do is to shovel manure out of the barn. When I first did this chore myself, I grumbled, “How is shoveling manure like working in a church?” My question was met with resounding silence and then laughter. I myself laughed, “Of course,” I said. “It’s exactly like working in the church.”

I learned a lot on the farm. Frequently I used those lessons to help solve problems in the parish, as well as to help cast vision. Every participant on the farm had their favorite go-to animal, plant, or activity that guided their ministry. Here is mine. I absolutely love chickens! I love everything about them. I love gathering eggs, I love feeding and watering them, I love changing



The Chicken Whisperer

out the straw in their nesting, I love holding them, and mostly I love eating them. On the farm, I had such a love for and skill with chickens, that I was known as “The Chicken Whisperer.” If a chicken managed to get out of the fence, I was always the one who was able to catch it and deliver it back to safety.

My former parish can tell you that I often likened them to a flock of chickens. See? Here is a snapshot of my parish now. Have you ever heard a flock of chickens that is happy? It’s a peaceful sound... contented clucking and peaceful murmuring. If one or two is unhappy, the sound is raucous and the whole flock is unnerved and anxious. Churches are like that too, aren’t they? St. Benedict used to talk about the biggest problem in a faith community being “murmuring,” -- you know that unhappy complaining by a couple of people that unsettles a whole flock.



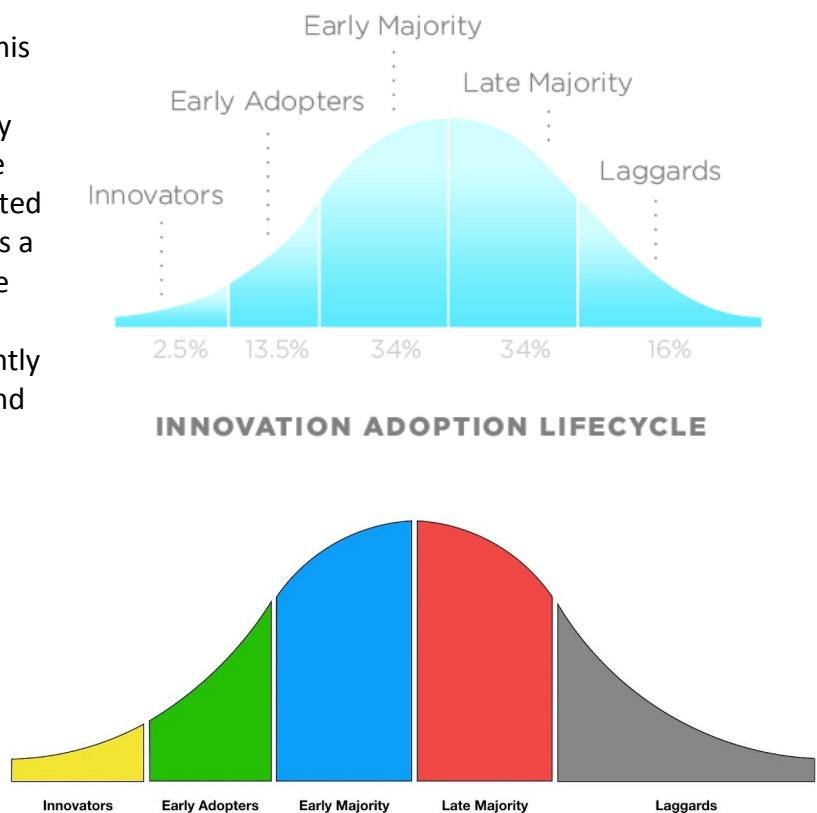
My “parish”

Today I’m going to teach you a lesson that chickens taught me about change – and particularly about change in the church. When I work with Vestries and ask them how they might help their church to change and grow, I often meet with resistance. We don’t want to change. But here’s the deal. The church IS changing, whether we like it or not. The church is moving forward...into the future. God is working mightily to shape His Church, and the question is – are we going to recognize the Church God is shaping for us? Are we going to embrace the gift of the future Church to which we are headed? God is in charge, and we are not; and we have to get moving. So anyway, here’s the lesson.

Jeff’s farm was known in the region for its pastured chicken. Chickens that are raised outside in pasture taste differently from chicken bought in the grocery store. With Jeff’s chicken, you can taste the sunshine in the meat. Restaurants send in a steady stream of orders for Jeff’s chickens. But you can’t just let chickens run around unprotected in the pasture. They become the subject of aerial predators. They need safe enclosures to protect them. The enclosures that Jeff provided were actually wire moveable chicken pens, about 64 square feet each. One of our chores on the farm was to move these pens each day to a fresh spot of pasture. That way, chickens were exposed each day to fresh greens, a new assortment of bugs and were able to leave the old spot of pasture that had become soiled by their use. To accomplish this movement, two people had to stand at the front of the pen and pull a chain attached to the pen so that the pen moved (with the chickens in it). Two people stood at the back of the pen to help push and guide it. The chickens actually had no choice in the matter. Their job was to move with the pen when it started moving. Whether they liked it or not, whether they were ready or not, this pen was going to move and if they didn’t move, there were going to be consequences.

Most of the chickens were on board with this idea. As soon as the pen began to inch forward a small portion of the chickens would run to the front of the pen eagerly to move with it. You could almost hear them saying, “Ooh new grass, clover, new bugs. I’m so excited!” These pioneering chickens would lead the way, and soon other chickens would follow and then other chickens would follow them. But there was always a portion of the flock that would remain behind in the back of the moving pen, refusing to move. In fact, if chickens had heels, these chickens would certainly be digging them in – “I like this back pew,” they said, “and I’m not moving, no matter what.” The problem, though, the thing these resolute chickens didn’t understand is that like it or not, this pen was going to move. And if they didn’t get moving, their legs were going to get stuck under the back of the pen and become broken. So it became the job of the two people in the back of the pen to bang on the top and sides of the pen to scare these back pew-huggers forward. Done successfully, each day the chickens got new pasture and no broken legs.

This chicken behavior is no different from average church parishioner behavior, in fact average human behavior. Psychologists have studied this behavior and have determined that groups actually form a sort of bell curve as to how they respond to change – this curve being called the “innovation adoption life cycle.” They have noted that when change is introduced, there is always a small group of people, about 2.5% of the whole group, who is willing to jump right in and lead. They are called the “innovators.” Another slightly larger group, about 13.5% follows closely behind the innovators. They are called the “early adopters.” Then about a third of the group, observing the fun that the innovators and the early adopters are having, will follow. This group is called the “early majority.” They are followed by another 34% of the group, called the “late majority.” But at the very end, the group that digs in its heels and refuses to move are the “laggards.” These are the ones that need someone to bang on their pens to move them so that their legs don’t get broken.



I loved that job. I loved banging on the pen and watching these chickens startle forward. I found myself wondering, “How can we do this in the church?” How can we motivate people to move forward with a Church that is moving forward?” It’s imperative that we do this because we don’t want anyone getting their legs broken. Because the reality is that the Church is changing. It’s moving forward whether we like it or not. God is fashioning a church for us that in 20 years is going to look very different from where we are now. We are moving to new pastures, and my job is to bang on your comfortable pen and get you to move with it.

As Bishop, I am frequently asked about Vision. People want to know where we are going. They want to know what initiatives I am going to be starting. And it’s important to have Vision. Vision gives life, and life fails for lack of vision. And even if we don’t know exactly where God is leading us as the Church, we understand that Vision is important. A diocese that has Vision can be about important work for the sake of God’s Kingdom, even if they can’t see the end result. I wish that I could say that I have an elaborate Vision to articulate for you this morning; but after four weeks in office that’s impossible. However, I have an idea of where I’d like to go and I would like to share my thoughts with you.

As I said earlier, the Church is changing. God is fashioning a new Church for us and is leading us at breakneck speed into the future. We are tempted, as we head into this new ground, to fashion a vision that is flashy and innovative. We want the latest trend...the latest program that is going to attract new members, more money, and fully restored, accessible buildings. But I’d like to call us back for a bit. I’d like for us, as we begin our lives together as Bishop and people to focus on something a little more fundamental, a little more basic, but a lot more life-giving. I want to call us back to our Baptismal Vows – those promises we made at our Baptism or which were made on our behalf by parents and god-parents. If we live fully into these promises, our lives will become lives of meaning and purpose. And from that meaning a purpose, a vision will emerge.

So I'm going to go through the Baptismal Promises (there are five of them), and with each one, I'm going to do two things. First I will tell you what my expectations are of YOU and then tell you what I hope you can expect from ME.

Baptismal Promise Number One: Will you continue in the Apostle's teaching, in the prayers, in the fellowship and in the breaking of the bread?"

Most of us realize that in order to keep this promise, the main thing that we need to do is go to Church. The first Baptismal Promise plants us squarely in the Community of the Baptized – the Christian Community. There we hear the teaching of the Apostles. We learn to pray. We have fellowship with one another and we break the bread of Eucharist. Church attendance is essential to Baptismal Promise number one.

Your bishop expects you to:

- Go to Church
- Read the Bible
- Pray
- Be in Community

In return your bishop will:

- Visit All Parishes
- Strengthen and grow Diaconal program to aid in implementation of Diocesan mission.
- Allocate financial and educational resources where needed
- Support clergy so that they can support you—Face to face meetings, email, telephone, Involvement with Clericus Meetings.
- Regular visitation and consultation with vestries, especially for parishes in crisis.
- Implement Diocesan Church Development Institute (DCDI) [May 12 Clergy Day]

Baptismal Promise Number Two: Will you persevere in resisting evil and whenever you fall into sin repent and return to the Lord?

With the first promise, we attend to our communal life. With this second promise, we tend to our interior life – making sure that we are following God's commandments, with His grace, to the best of our ability. Engaging in spiritual disciplines that support this promise. Being willing to attend to self-examination and seeking reconciliation for sins of commission and omission.

Your bishop expects you to:

- Engage in a life of prayer that focuses on examining your life in relationship to God.
- Follow a Rule of Life that supports your vocation and God's will for you.
- If it seems appropriate, make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation ("All may, some should, none must.")

In return your bishop will:

- Pray for you and the clergy who lead you
- Provide teaching on Prayer and Rule of Life
- Maintain my own prayer and Rule of Life (which includes use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation)

Baptismal Promise Number Three: Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of Jesus Christ?

I'll go ahead and get the utterance of the dread E-word out of the way – EVANGELISM! But we needn't be afraid of it. We all have a story to tell. We all know Jesus and the impact that he has had on us. We just aren't used to talking about it. It might help us to reframe that word Evangelism and start using the word PROCLAMATION. So part of living into Baptismal promise number three is learning our stories and learning how to tell them.

Your bishop expects you to:

- Know your story and practice telling it.

- Participate in DCDI.
- Practice Proclamation in both word and deed.

In return your bishop will:

- Implement DCDI and be present at every training
- Offer “Open Office Hours”
- Meet with clergy in each convocation for lunch
- Offer training in Evangelism (Proclamation)
- Diocesan Task Force on Evangelism (Proclamation)

Baptismal Promise Number Four: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

We all recognize in this promise The First Commandment and the second one that is like it. We are to love and serve God and love and serve our neighbors as if they were us. Many, in not all, parishes in our Diocese are already doing splendid work on behalf of their neighbors. Part of good stewardship is to recognize our gifts and how they can intersect with the world’s deepest need.

Your bishop expects you to:

- Engage in ongoing renewal of your relationship to God and your relationship to others.
- Talk to other Christians about what God is calling you to do for your neighbor.
- Then do it! Do what you love to do! Do what God is calling you to do!

In return your bishop will:

- Use “Open Office Hours” for brain-storming and listening
- Allocate financial and educational resources
- Facilitate Asset Mapping of services offered by parishes in diocese

Baptismal Promise Number Five: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

God desires justice to roll down like water and flowing streams. Again, many of you are already doing this work on behalf of your oppressed neighbors. What else do we need to do?

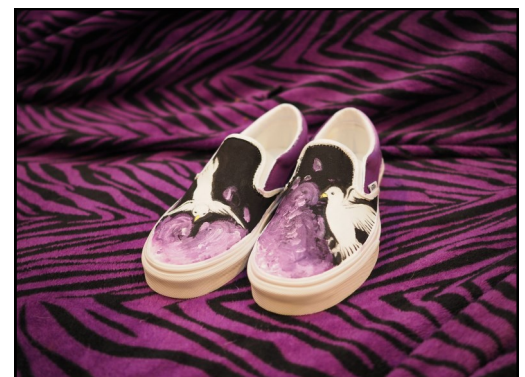
Your bishop expects you to:

- Avoid engaging in polarizing politics
- Educate yourself and become passionate
- Participate in issues that you are passionate about.

In return your bishop will:

- Actively support racial reconciliation, particularly through “Repairers of the Breach”
- Establish Diocesan Care of Creation Task Force
- Remain continually educated regarding issues of social justice

So the church is moving! It’s changing, whether we like it or not. We can’t stop it. The question is, are we going to move with it? Or are we going to hang out in the back and wait for our legs to be broken. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we are told, “And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Many of you have heard me say that I want to hit the ground running. My niece painted these shoes for me for that purpose – shoes painted with the Holy Spirit. The staff, in honor of my desire to get running, is wearing running shoes to this year’s council. What about you? Where are your shoes? Where is your focus? So let us all keep our eyes on Jesus and get moving! AMEN



Get your running shoes on!