

“For you are all one in Christ Jesus” Galatians 3:28b

Dear Siblings in the Diocese of California,

In my first letter as your new pastor, it is my tremendous joy and honor to address you today and to share one of my great hopes for this next chapter of our common life. Over the past several months, I’ve enjoyed meeting you, joining you in celebrations and solemnities, and appreciating all the many gifts that God has already blessed us with in this portion of the vineyard called the Diocese of California. I give thanks for these many blessings (including the person reading this to you now), and my deepest prayer is that we can faithfully build upon these gifts and experiences in the years ahead to be part of a church that helps transform the wider world into God’s beloved community.

Such transformation will neither be quick nor easy. Besides the predominant cultural storms that rage in the political and social spheres, we simultaneously face headwinds within our Diocese. We have trust to build with each other. We have wounds to heal. We have relationships to develop. We have shared values to discover. I deeply trust that God is longing for our wholeness as a Diocese. I believe that getting honest with one another about these headwinds and difficulties, entrusting their healing to Christ, and sharing our best practices for ministry are faithful ways for us to discern a path forward as one whole and joyful body.

Amidst these gifts and challenges, the best way I know to be a faithful leader with you is to listen to you wholeheartedly. I want to hear how God has already been at work among you. I want to hear about the many successes in ministry you have built over generations in this place. I also want to hear about your pain and frustration, your fear and uncertainty. I want to be with you in the ways we’ve fallen short of the glory of God in our dealings with one another.

During the bishop search process, I heard your call—a call to discern a shared strategic vision for the Diocese of California. And I am convinced that doing this visioning work together is an essential first step in building trust with one another and ensuring the many diverse and wonderful members of our diocese are common stakeholders in our shared future.

Consequently, the first thing I ask of you as your new diocesan bishop is to pray for this process and, specifically, that we might discern God’s will together and gain the strength to pursue it.

The second thing I ask is that you engage this process with integrity and hopeful intention.

The Executive Council and I are beginning this process by scheduling five Listening Sessions around our Diocese. These sessions are an important first step in the overall effort to map a strategic plan for our Diocese; a path that we pray will mimic the path God has laid for us. **Please receive my heartfelt invitation to participate in one of these listening sessions.** I hope you will make every effort to join us and encourage the widest participation possible from your siblings in our Diocese:

- **Thursday, September 5, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm, St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Orinda**
- **Tuesday, September 10, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm, Online Zoom Meeting**
- **Saturday, September 14, Noon – 2:00 pm, Church of the Nativity, San Rafael**
- **Monday, September 16, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm, St. Ambrose Episcopal Church, Foster City**
- **Thursday, September 25 – 27, Clergy Retreat, The Bishop’s Ranch**

Pastoral Letter from Bishop Austin Keith Rios to the Episcopal Diocese of California August 2024

Spanish interpretation will be available at all meetings, and we will translate the written materials for each session into Spanish, Mandarin, Tagalog, and Tongan. We will present initial learnings from our Listening Sessions at this year's Diocesan Convention on October 25th and 26th.

My hope is that, as we begin discerning together, we will begin growing together—into the united body God calls us to be.

And that the vision we pursue will be ours—not mine, not our diocesan staff's, not one congregation's, nor one parishioner's vision—but *our* vision, to live out with God's help.

I don't yet know where the process will lead, which is part of the joy, actually! I am excited and look forward to being surprised at how and where God will lead us, even as I hope to build upon the profound legacy of ministry and faithfulness that has come before my call to serve as your bishop. But even as I remain open to that uncertain future of "treasures old and new[1]" I do know something about what will lead us there.

As we listen, discern, and dream together, the way to greater life and a shared and faithful vision for this next chapter of our common life passes through the truth and the mystery of the Cross of Christ. And we must follow Jesus' wisdom to get where our hearts long to go.

That means loving God and each other in thought, word, and deed.

It means being willing to serve one another as Christ served his disciples and those beyond.

It means loving our neighbors, seeing them clearly, and attending to them.

And it means letting go of the limitations of "I" "me" and "mine" and "us vs. them" and moving toward the resurrected life of "we" and "our."

The more we do that, the more we can follow Jesus' path of transformation from one single grain of wheat into an abundant harvest of bread for the world[2]—

the more our hearts will burn within us,
the more our congregations will thrive and be shapers of meaning and hope for a starving and thirsting world,
the more our diocese will be a connecting and resourcing force for good in the Bay Area,
and the more the contours of our shared vision will come to shape and shift the wider world around us.

I am here among you as bishop because I believe this work is worth doing, and it is worth doing together. I look forward to hearing from you, walking with you, and serving alongside you in the months and years to come.

Yours in Christ,

The Rt. Rev. Austin Keith Rios

[1] Matthew 13:52

[2] John 12:24