

ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Please share a vocational and spiritual experience that has influenced your consideration in your call to the office of bishop, and to the Diocese of South Carolina in particular.

Five years ago I returned home to the Diocese of Fort Worth, a community with a spiritual and legal history parallel to South Carolina's in regards to schism and the Anglican Church of North America. The parish and diocese I serve, like many in South Carolina, had found themselves thrown into the parking lot of their church communities for being too spiritually generous - supporting the ordination of women and LGBTQ+ folks. This did not stop us, however, from becoming a healthy, flourishing mission of God in our community. What I have experienced is a strengthening of my spirit to know that, despite very difficult obstacles, those who commit themselves to the inclusive values and dreams of Jesus will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to heal the broken-hearted, to feed the hungry - to be Good News for the world.

This experience, on both the parish and diocesan level, has manifest in my leadership towards community reconciliation and future oriented hope and action. Coupled with my work in a variety of parish types, non-profit, and government (military) organizations I find myself with a uniquely broad experience and set of skills to effectively work with a broad spectrum of contexts. I find myself especially called to work with communities that find themselves in the liminal space between the way we were and the way God is calling us into. It seems to me that South Carolina, like Fort Worth, is in that liminal space. For the past six years my colleagues and friends have pestered me to submit my name for various bishop search processes. I have avoided this until now because I am not interested in just being a bishop. If it is the will of God, I am interested in being a bishop for a people with whom my particular gifts and talents are best used, such as South Carolina. I am a builder of communal systems and relationships by nature (ENTJ, Enneagram 8, Clifford strengths Strategic, Achiever, Arranger, and Learner; DiSC Di). South Carolina is going to need a leader and pastor who is comfortable living in the messy, sometimes unclear liminal space between what was and what is going to become. I believe I am being called into discerning if I am that person.

2. Bishops are to carry out the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church. What talents and strengths do you bring to the shepherding of the Diocese of South Carolina through the challenges that we are facing: a. during the transition to reconciliation with the returning congregations, and b. as a result of historical and current issues of inclusion and diversity (age, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality)?

In a very recent discernment retreat for church planters the evaluators observed that I "have a unique gift for reconciliation work." I was a little surprised to hear this because I hadn't really seen myself in this way. When I questioned them, they pointed out several distinct, measurable events in my vocational life in which I had effected communal

reconciliation. As one assessor said, “One could be luck; two might be skill; three is a clear pattern of gift.” Heretofore, I’ve never been very forthcoming about taking off this bushel basket in order to announce my reconciliation gifts. However, the Diocese of South Carolina, like I have experienced in the Diocese of Fort Worth, needs and will need an intentional path towards healthy reconciliation as a communal entity.

I have specific training from the Alban Institute at Duke in conflict resolution, which laid the ground work for more education from the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center and the Cooperative College for Congregational Development. In practice this has served me well as I’ve walked with parish communities through potentially contentious conversations. Here are a couple examples:

Developing and integrating a Spanish speaking first and second generation Hispanic community within an historic, conservative southern town societally hyper-sensitive, Anglo congregation. As rector of the Anglo parish, I was approached by a handful of native Spanish speaking former Catholics about establishing an Episcopal worshiping community within the Anglo facility. It turned out to be a very sensitive subject, not around the presenting symptoms of “We can’t imagine that you’ll have enough time to work with both groups” or “they should learn English; therefore they should worship with us,” but really around deep systemic and individual bigotry and racism. Systemically, the issue was around “What are our neighbors going to say about us?” Individually, the issue was around the perception that Hispanics are loud, dirty, and takers from the system. We developed and implemented a parish-wide conversation with both groups - English and Spanish speakers - separate and together. In the end, we all figured out a way forward in trust with each other and the Holy Spirit. Today, the Spanish speaking group is an integral, valued part of the community of which the Anglo members are grateful to claim as part of the church family.

Successfully leading a community into reconciliation with LGBTQ+ matters is personal for me. My current parish struggled with this issue, losing it’s rector along with one-third of it’s membership and budget in 2013. When I arrived in 2015 there was significant reconciliation work to be done. Just about the time communal reconciliation was fulfilled, I realized I could no longer continue to pretend to be a straight man. I also knew my “coming out” had the potential to undo all the reconciliation work we’d achieved. Using the organizational change models I’d previously learned, the diocesan communications officer and I developed a process of unfolding this information in a helpful, not harmful, way. Through education, conversation, and patience the parish is now very proud that they modeled a positive, experience of spiritual growth, moving from valuing differentness as an abstract idea to practicing it in real life. Within a generally religiously conservative city they have become an attractive refuge for many LGBTQ+ Christians, non-church people, and allies.

3. Where do you envision the Episcopal Church’s ministry during the next decade? What actions have you taken as an active participant in the future of the church and how will that inform your work in the Diocese of South Carolina?

Since entering the Episcopal Church in 1987 I have watched the same lament year after year regarding church growth, or lack of it. However, fundamentally the practice of the Episcopal Church never changed from the Baby Boom era. The Baby Boom is long gone, and yet, many empty 1960's era Sunday school rooms await its return.

The church can no longer be a siloed island, safely ensconced within our beautiful walls, segregated from the surrounding culture, not only for financial realities, but even more importantly for stewardship realities. I think God must wonder why we're sitting on all these wonderful assets and not sharing them with God's world.

Our call is to break out beyond our religious islands and integrate into our surrounding communities in real, tangible ways. The Episcopal Church carries within our values and worldview gifts and practices that many in the world are desperate to hear and know: non-shame based relationships with God; "all are valued" practices; deep, not surface layer, prayers that re-shape the spirit; joy that comes from authentic, not hypocritical religious practices; a willingness to recognize, embrace, and deal with our imperfections. If South Carolina is anything like Fort Worth you have learned and embraced these values the hard way. It has cost you something to stand up for what you know to be true, good, and just.

My current parish is one of those congregations that found themselves standing in the parking lot of their church after being kicked out for being too spiritually generous. For five years they caught their breath and strengthened their values. At this point I arrived and led them into engaging in the risky question "If we were to honestly, objectively ask the Holy Spirit who we are called to be and do, what would she say to us? Where is she leading us?" We did this through a custom-made communal discernment process called, "What's Next?: Discerning Communal Mission and Ministry." (This process has subsequently been successfully used by several other parishes.) The answer for our parish is to work in partnership with the City, philanthropists, private developers, and other non-profits to build a work-force housing complex downtown within which we will be nested in a hyper-flexible, multi-use space that might be church on Sunday, a farmer's market on Thursday, and a small symphony space on Tuesday night - an urban village with the parish as the soul. We call this The Gathering Project. That's the church of the future - a de-siloed, integrated, interactive community positively effecting change within the broader neighborhood.

4. *How have you built relationships in your ministry and how might you build relationships among the diverse worshipping communities in our diocese?*

I am a builder of teams. Nothing builds shared community more than a common challenge and a shared sustainable aspiration, eventually resulting in deep care for your teammates. I experienced this in the military and politics and decided to apply it to the church world. This has manifest itself in my vocational work by pulling together unconnected groups to imagine, organize, and implement shared activities for the benefit of the world. For example, in Arlington, Mansfield, and Grand Prairie, TX we created a federation of the handful of worshipping communities - Christian and Jewish - that are

authentically Open and Affirming of LGBTQ+ people to vouch for validity to seekers, educate the broader community, and provide mutual support in a region that is religiously conservative. In North Carolina we pulled together five churches to create a shelter for victims of domestic violence . In Fort Worth we pulled four parishes together to create a large, vibrant food pantry . The aforementioned Gathering Project in Arlington is pulling together a complex team of church entities, for profit developers, city leaders, philanthropists, and university staff to revitalize downtown with an urban village.

In the end, it's not enough to be against something. In Fort Worth it was very easy and reasonably understandable to be against Jack Iker, the former bishop. I guess in South Carolina it might be understandably easy for many to be against the former leadership. However, healthy teams must also be for something. It takes a topically educated, experienced, committed leader and leadership team to move a community from victim to resurrection. We may never get our property back, but we are living as a resurrected people. It is a joy, and others are attracted by this joy.

Relationship building is a marathon, not a sprint. In the end there is no substitute for time spent with people. The best leaders I've experienced are the ones who've called me out of the blue to check on me. A plan is not a relationship - a relationship is sharing a cup of coffee, paying close enough attention to hear people's dreams and fears. If I was called to be a bishop I would carry forward ideas I've seen my bishops do in the three dioceses in which I've served: birthday month check-ins, a rolodex with notes about people's lives, a pastoral care matrix including a staff member prodding me to make the phone calls, notes, and check-ins. It's management by walking around, and its grounded in actually caring about your teammates.

5. The larger societal context of health and economic uncertainty, divisiveness and social change leaves many with a sense of pessimism, anxiety and even despair. How have you proclaimed a message of hope during these difficult times? As we struggle with these issues in the world, how have you gotten in the trenches with us and led others to do God's work?

Perhaps it sounds pollyannaish and out of vogue in our "prove it" world, but I am an "expect a miracle" kind of person. I've seen them. Once we did a Soles for Souls shoe donation. At that time the shipping cost was related to the weight of the collected shoes. No one knew ahead of time how many we'd collect. When packing up the last pair of shoes we discovered some cash in the toe which was one cent more than the cost of shipping.

As a curate I visited a hospitalized parishioner every other day for six weeks. One afternoon I arrived just after the docs told her they were going to amputate her leg in two days time. We prayed. We prayed hard and without cynicism. In two days whatever it was that was eating her flesh had receded and she kept her leg. Her husband later told me that she was going to kill herself and because of the saved leg she did not. That incident reshaped my faith; it reshaped my life.

A few years ago we read an article about the high rate of food insecurity among college students. We met with the University folks who told us the greatest need was among foreign graduate students, who were mostly Islamic or Hindu. However, the local para-church operated food pantry made these students pray with them, so they went hungry instead. We realized our call was simply to feed the hungry (see Jesus' encounter with the Syrophenician woman, who remains a gentile). One day I gave a Hindu student a sack of groceries. She stood there. I said, "Is there something else you need?" She responded, "Aren't you going to make me pray with you?" "No," I said, "only if you want me to." She began to cry tears of joy because we had respected and affirmed her humanity as a person, as she was. Now she helps us hand out groceries. That is in-the-trenches living Good News.

This moment also reshaped my life by reaffirming my certain knowledge that God is immanently with us - that there is no place and no one where God is not. This message seeps into almost every sermon, spiritual direction, and Christian formation conversation I have. When that message sinks into a person's soul it changes their whole outlook on the world. Yes, we do live in chaotic times, but with this certain knowledge despair no longer prevails - God prevails. God wins. Good News wins. Love wins.

This does not mean that I shy away from challenge, always playing it theologically safe. After all, I am a practitioner of St. Ignatius's daily Examen. People are having these difficult conversations about the things of the world. Why wouldn't we, as the church provide a safe, respectful context in which for people to grow. I think most people come to church expecting to grow into deeper relationship with God. When I watch my folks sing *Day by Day*, *All Are Welcome*, or *Simple Gifts* the yearning to be those lyrics is clearly written on their faces. Let's help them grow into that.