

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.

I am a native Charlestonian, born and reared in one of the oldest African American communities in West Ashley, Ashleyville [Maryville]. Growing up in that beautifully close-knit community, I was keenly aware of the connectedness to my family, my community, and the Church. This was the type of community where I was taught to say “hello” to everyone, especially my elders, to respect the gifts of the earth, as we had a garden and grew vegetables and fruit, and I often went crabbing, in the Ashley River, with my best friend.

It was in Charleston that I learned to love God. It was also the elders, many of whom have gone on to the “church triumphant,” that spoke a word of hope and encouragement into my spirit, especially my great-uncle Christopher. He visited our home often, and each time he would kiss me on my forehead, grab my head, and say to my parents, “That boy is going to be a preacher one day.” His was the first prophetic voice I heard in my life. I became known to all my friends in the community and in school as “Rev.” As I continued my life’s journey, those in my community and church affirmed my call to ministry and leadership in the church. I know that I am called to serve God’s people in God’s church, and I believe my experiences and training have prepared me to lead in such a time as this.

Bishop Edward Salmon invited me to Nashotah House Seminary, where I was formed as a priest. As I reflect on my seminary experience, I thank Bishop Salmon for his recommendation as Nashotah’s life of prayer, service, and study has been instrumental to success in ministry in various places and congregations I have served. During my vocation, I have led family, pastoral, and corporate-sized congregations. In each of those experiences, I have often looked to the wisdom of Fr. William Weaver and Bishop “Bill” Skilton. These men were influential in my spiritual and vocational journey. Fr. Weaver baptized me at Epiphany Church in Summerville, SC, and I spent countless hours in his home learning about his experiences as Priest in the Diocese of South Carolina. He taught me a love for God’s people and the Church. Bishop Skilton confirmed me at Epiphany Church. His leadership, love, and call for mission exemplified an example of the Episcopacy that I would often reflect upon as I lead the people of God. The Church has taken me throughout the world, but I have never forgotten home. Those lay and ordained people of my community and the church that poured into my spirit and into my vocation have prepared me to return home. As I answer the call to leadership here in the Diocese of South Carolina, I hear God “softly and tenderly,” calling me home.

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)?

I am a “self-differentiated leader.” Edwin Friedman popularized the phrase.¹ A self-differentiated leader is not so overly identified with a group that he or she leads that he or she can’t gain perspective and make necessary difficult decisions. This work requires a leader to realize that while she/he cannot please everyone, he/she can establish the conditions for all to be heard, respected, and valued.

In my tenure as Canon Pastor at the Cathedral of St. John, Albuquerque, New Mexico, I worked with congregations and their leadership through periods of transition and reconciliation helping to prepare them to receive new pastoral ministry. This work began the development of my conflict resolution skills. I continued this work in the Diocese of Long Island, being asked by the bishop to become priest-in-charge of St. John’s, a parish in transition while serving as rector of another church. During my time at St. John’s, it was my task to move the congregation from a period of stagnation through teaching, preaching, and reconciling to a place of preparation to receive new, dynamic ministry. This was achieved.

In addition to being a self-differentiated leader, I am a pastor and lover of humanity. This is who I am at the core of my being and identity. I love God’s people and enjoy being with the people of God, and as such, I am also called to protect and defend God’s people. I am also a servant leader. It is my responsibility to love and shepherd God’s people, understanding that this requires me to be a healer and reconciler.

There are those who have been hurt by the Church. We are to recognize that this hurt exists whether it is a congregation returning with its concerns and fears of full inclusion in the life of the diocese, or historically black congregations that have seen years without adequate leadership, or those who are LGBTQIA+ living in places where the voices of homophobia reign, or it could be our youth who have not found acceptance in our churches. After recognition we can begin the process of listening and then the process of reconciliation.

Not only have I shepherded diverse communities and church members with love, but I am among those who have experienced not being included and seen in society. Accordingly, my communal imagination pivots around what theologian M. Shawn Copeland calls Eucharistic solidarity. The Body of Christ only matures into the sacrificial, love movement of Jesus when we secure seats at the table for all human bodies.

When I invoke the terms diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation, I mean cultivating a culture of repair and justice in our congregations and leaders. The Episcopal Church is poised to repair harms by embracing differences as sacred and sharing power, which is a holy act.

¹ See Edwin H. Friedman’s *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. (New York, NY: Seabury Publishing, 1999, 2007). He says the self-differentiated leader: Acts as the immune system for organizations. If a toxic person enters the system (team, family, group), the leader keeps that toxicity from spreading. The self-differentiated leader has the capacity to take strong stands and make hard calls that are ultimately good for everyone. They contain their own reactions even when those around them grow anxious and insecure. They are clear on their personal values and goals and take responsibility for their own well-being rather than blame others or the context.

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?*

I believe that the Episcopal Church will continue its leadership in the world in missions, domestic and foreign. This is the legacy of our Church, and it is in our DNA. The Great Commission remains our calling. However, the means by which we carry out the Great Commission are ever-changing.

As we move into the next decade, we in the Church will need to reimagine how we live into our call to live out the Great Commission. This reimagining requires us to affirm the tenets of our faith while embracing what is and yet will be. One of the areas in which reimagining will be clearly seen is in the church online. I believe that post-COVID-19, all churches with a future, will be bivocal. This means that they will have brick and mortar locations and online locations. Both locations will have to be robust. The next decade will require a high level of online stewardship; the Church will need to pivot and invest heavily in being online.

Also, as it has done in the past, in the next decade, the Episcopal Church can take the lead on issues of human sexuality, racial reconciliation, environmental stewardship, and social justice. By all measures, these will be significant issues in the next decade. I also believe that the church will continue its call by our Savior and our Presiding Bishop to love.

From the inner city of Chicago to the Hispaniola community of the Dominican Republic to the Pee Dee of South Carolina to Navajo Land in Utah to the inner cities of Queens and Harlem, New York, I have worked to show first the love of Christ to all of God's children, especially to those on the margins of society. My work with the church in Navajo Land and the Dominican Republic taught me the vast diversity of the Church and its need to respect indigenous peoples and their culture while journeying with them on this way called Christianity. Christianity cannot look the same everywhere; culture matters.

In the Diocese of Long Island, I served as Vice President of the Board of Managers for Camp DeWolfe. Through teaching, praying, singing and technology we showered youth with God's love. To paraphrase Professor Obery Hendricks, in his book *The Politics of Jesus*, "We treated the needs of our young people as holy."

At St. Philip's, where I currently serve, I have collaborated with the Diocese of New York in confronting the societal residue of slavery. Our work with ecumenical partners such as the Interfaith Center of New York and The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies has allowed us to collaborate with community organizations to deal with societal concerns in the Harlem and greater New York City communities.

The Diocese of South Carolina has a strong and goodly heritage of ministry in South Carolina. It will move into the second decade of the 21st Century needing to do the work of reconciliation while being a prophetic voice to a changing community. I believe we can resolve litigious entanglements and heal deep wounds during this period. My past work has prepared me for this opportunity.

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

I have worked in diverse communities to be a unifier and builder of God's Kingdom. I believe at least three things are important to build relationships in ministry: 1) An understanding that Christianity is about relationships and the gift of hospitality, 2) Love, Love, Love, and 3) Celebrate diversity in how you live, teach, and serve, knowing we are all made in the image of God.

My very first congregation was in Bennettsville, South Carolina. Just graduating seminary, I would become the first Black priest the congregation would experience. During my tenure, we built collaborative relationships, despite some in the community who were suspect of the call, by bestowing trust in each other and living out radical hospitality. This meant that we shifted from only offering welcome to others and stood with them if they were on the margins. I taught the congregation that if we loved one another, we would become living examples of the beloved community. We did!

We also should love the people, love the people, love the people. This is agape love, a love that will speak "truth to power" and transcend stark individualism and fear so that we can become a unified people of God. I experienced this at St. Paul's and later at St. Gabriel's Church in Jamaica, New York. St. Gabriel's Church is the most diverse congregation I have served. The congregation consisted of African Americans, West Indians, Africans (Igbo and Yoruba), Europeans, Afro-Latinx, and White Americans. We were the Kingdom of God, and instead of seeing this diversity as a weakness, I taught the congregation to celebrate diversity as a strength. We did this through teaching, programs, community service, prayer, music, and special celebrations. By celebrating our strengths in diversity, we were able to move beyond ourselves and develop collaborative ministry with the Queens Federation of Churches, which was an ecumenical organization, and with the Diocese of Wiawso, Ghana, among others.

Finally, it is important to celebrate our diversity, remembering that we are all made in the image of God. As Bishop of South Carolina, it would be my goal and that of the diocese to celebrate diversity in the diocese. We have our sisters and brothers who are LGBTQIA+, those seeking, those of interfaith identities, and those who do not profess any faith at all (those who Elizabeth Drescher calls "nones").² All must be embraced.

² Elizabeth Drescher, *Choosing Our Religion: The Spiritual Lives of America's Nones*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially see chapters one and two. Using Drescher's work as instructive, I posit that the Episcopal Church must learn to reconsider our positions on what it means to be a believer in God and how this is lived out by those who no longer accept the traditional faith formation paths offered by churches. Drescher's notion of liminal spirituality (the in-between and betwixt but not yet there time) is the method she recommends to churches to have us reconsider whether people are forever lost members of a fold, remain as children of God although not attached to churches, or continue to live as people of God who are on a journey to become who God wants them to be.

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?

I currently serve as Rector of the historic St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Harlem, New York. St. Philip's is the oldest black Episcopal Church in New York State and the second oldest black Episcopal Church in the country. In our nearly 212-year history, we have served the people of New York and the Village of Harlem during some of the most difficult times in the life of our nation. I learned the history of St. Phillip's and lived into it. I was able to do this because I grew up listening to preachers of hope. My people have taught me that each act of hope is a subversive act of necessity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we at St. Philip's find ourselves living out our ministry in a changing, diverse community. Today, Harlem is a gentrified community which still consists of the disenfranchised and historically oppressed which are often deemed invisible. At the height of this pandemic, there were many in our community that succumbed to the disease of COVID-19. At St. Philip's, we have continued, even during these uncertain times, to live out our call to be a vanguard and beacon of hope in our Village of Harlem.

Not only have we been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but our community has felt the despair of the killing of George Floyd and many black Americans who have died at the hands of law enforcement in our nation and in New York. As the pastor of a church whose people have known oppression, hope has to be proclaimed in word and deed. Each Sunday, and during the week, I remind the faithful people of St. Philip's that we worship a God, in Christ, who is a liberator from oppression, a provider of our needs, and our constant companion on this earthly pilgrimage.

I remind them that when we look back at the history of God's people from Africa to the Americas to the people of St. Philip's leaving Trinity Wall Street to form their own church, to the Flu Pandemic of 1918, to our current pandemic(s), we are still here and remain a light to those who are in darkness. Instead of focusing on the difficulties, we walk in faith and serve as agents of change in our community while living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, we remain involved in our community's struggle. Whether it is through voter registration, or marching with my son and other Harlem community churches in the "Black Lives Matter" silent protest through Manhattan, to our monthly feeding the homeless in Marcus Garvey Park while celebrating the Eucharist, to having our church open during the pandemic for those who need to access funds from our Credit Union, we continue the work. For the community that I serve as Priest/Pastor, it is our looking back at our legacy of advocacy for the Harlem community's people that gives us and me the strength to continue to live out the gospel in word and in deed. I will bring this work ethic and hopefulness to the Diocese of South Carolina.