

## **The Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton**

Dear people of the Diocese of Maine, I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to walk with you on this final stage of discernment towards electing the tenth Bishop of Maine. The Episcopal Church is in the midst of a period of organizational challenge and transformation, and I believe that your diocese is on the forefront of engaging this process. I admire the work you have done and are continuing to do. Your commitment to serve the people beyond the doors of your churches, to care for your neighbors, to provide resources to those in need, and to respond to issues of social justice resonates deeply with me.

I can see by the work that you are doing in the areas of church reorganization, liturgical creativity, and community networking that you are committed to continuing a process of adaptive change as a diocese. I know that this type of organizational re-imagining and restructuring can be both painful and energizing. I also know that for long-term sustainability and effective ministry, the work you are doing is vitally important in order to continue the Church's presence and ministries to the communities of Maine.

I have been working with community and organizational development for almost 25 years in a variety of organizational settings. I have experience in multiple valid ways of being church and have been privileged to companion several emerging models of church structure and leadership as either a leader or consultant. My academic background in cultural anthropology, cross-cultural communication, organizational systems, and pastoral care all contribute to the holistic approach I bring to my ministry and leadership. I believe that in this journey of transition for the Church, the role of a Bishop requires a balance of both organizational skills and pastoral sensitivity, and my background includes significant experience in both areas. I am passionate about caring for the Church as an organization and about meaningful care, connection, and support of its people on our common journey.

A central theme of my congregational ministries since 2004 has been working with congregations to identify and develop renewed communal identity, leadership structure, vision, and mission. For me, strategic planning is a spiritual endeavor that should be guided by intentional concepts of stewardship and long-term sustainability. Currently, I serve as Rector of a congregation in a town that has experienced a significant loss of local industries over the past generation. I can appreciate the economic changes and challenges confronting many of the church communities in Maine. Economics is often a significant factor among the socio-cultural forces that necessitate organizational change. It is also true that local congregations and dioceses benefit greatly from community processes that encourage creative, out-of-the box visioning at every level of the Church for genuine systemic change. Hildegard of Bingen's concept of "viriditas" (spiritual/physical health and growth) comes to my mind as throughout our Church we are experiencing a journey to cross and tomb that I believe will ultimately give rise to a revitalized and transformed community of faith.

Transformation can take many shapes and sizes. While serving for three years as the President of our Diocesan Standing Committee, I supported the use of a variety of church models including Total Common Ministry, ecumenical clusters, and inter-congregational partnerships. During my tenure as President of the Board for the Mission to Seafarers in Seattle (the second largest maritime ministry in The Episcopal Church), I developed significant fundraising events that engaged multiple community partners and churches as well as our own diocesan convention. When people would say, "But we've never done it that way before," my response

was usually along the lines of, “We follow a God who has promised to make all things new, so perhaps we ought not to be surprised when the Spirit inspires us to new ways of doing things.”

I believe that the power of partnering will be crucial for maintaining the long-term viability of our congregations and for linking people in the wider community with life-changing resources. In my current ministry, I have established and maintained relationships with local and state community government representatives as well as community groups. This has been an important part of interconnecting our diocesan ministries and committees in the areas of advocacy and support of immigrants and refugees as well as issues of concern to our LGBTQ community. I served for two years as our diocesan representative to the state governor’s faith advisory board and currently sit on an advisory body for one of our congressional representatives. This level of inter-disciplinary collaboration has helped identify ways that our congregations can make real differences in our local communities through advocacy and material support.

Connecting people with one another and with important resources is one of the reasons that I have been an advocate within Episcopal indigenous ministries church wide for over 17 years. I am Shackan First Nations (a Native North American group indigenous to British Columbia) on my mother’s side, and I also have ancestors on my father’s side that came to these shores on the Mayflower. In many ways, in my DNA, I embody significant aspects of the American experience. I deeply value the differing cultural and historical perspectives that characterize The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. I believe that it is important to both honor the traditions handed down to us and to be active participants in God’s work of creative renewal in every age.

Within my leadership style, I am committed to managing conflict in healthy and life-giving ways. I am not reactive in the face of challenging circumstances. I work from an administrative model of shared leadership and decision-making, and I enjoy working with knowledgeable staff, volunteers, youth and young adults, with church elders, and with retired clergy. I believe that I have an obligation as a leader to listen for and to that diversity before making decisions that will affect the whole.

In your diocese, I see significant ministry happening – you care for your neighbors through service and support; you are committed to your church communities. In your diocesan profile, you have given authentic expression to the concerns and hopes you have in confronting the challenges that you are experiencing. I can see that you have already taken important steps to adapt to the future and that you are committed to continued adaptation, even though you may fear for an unknown future. That is a truly living faith and a spiritual practice of hope that I share.

Among the responsibilities of a Bishop is the call to uphold the unity of the Church by “encouraging and supporting all the Baptized in their gifts and ministries, nourishing them from the riches of God’s grace and praying for them without ceasing.” I bring to you my skills in organizational assessment and development, administration, pastoral care, listening, financial management and strategic planning – all of which I humbly offer to the faithful work that you are doing. Making a New Creation is never easy. I see it as the work of God’s love incarnate in people and in communities, through which all things are made possible by a combination of encouragement and grace.

May God be with us all on this journey.