

Essay Responses: The Rev. Rachel K. Taber-Hamilton

1) What are the points in your vocation that direct you toward the Episcopate?

My journey in ministry and my personal faith relationship with God are intimately intertwined in my vocational journey of discernment to the episcopate. My experiences and choices have provided me with a comprehensive understanding of the nature and needs of The Episcopal Church as an organization and as a faith community. My academic background in cultural anthropology, symbol systems, organizational systems and theology all contribute to the holistic approach I bring to my ministry, teaching, planning, and preaching.

My experience in each organizational and community environment I have served has been that those who thrive through adaptation have three things in common: 1) they seek genuine reconciliation within their diversity, 2) they identify the need to form creative models of sustainable stewardship, and 3) they desire to communicate authentic identity in ways that build transformative communal experience. The key is *leadership* at every level and in every facet of the Church – forming and supporting lay, diaconal and priestly ministries and calling bishops to help equip and sustain people in leadership.

As with Christ (and the women and men who provided leadership in the early church), our baptism calls each of us to embody the Good News of freedom, peace and love. In my case, my vocational journey began by being drawn to embody God's creative action in the world as a priest. However, as I surveyed the organizational landscape of our Church, I came to believe that my skills could best be used through serving as a diocesan bishop, a position that requires a broad range of leadership skills in order to support systemic change effectively, while also empowering the leadership of others. There are many ways to be Church, and the laborers in our fields need support, encouragement and practical tools in order to move towards a more sustainable future within the real cultural and global forces of our time.

I have been engaged in leading community and organizational development inside and outside the Church for nearly 25 years. During that time, I have created and led leadership formation curriculum and training programs for volunteers, staff, and lay and ordained leadership within a wide range of settings, including parochial ministry, campus ministry, and spiritual care departments within a full spectrum of healthcare settings. I have personally served in leadership within a variety of parish models including yoked parishes, regional clusters of Lutheran and Episcopal parishes/missions, and individual parishes whose memberships have ranged from 12 to 400 members. Additionally, while serving as the President of Standing Committee, I provided oversight for the development of communities that wanted to transition into the model of Total Common Ministry (TCM). In sum, there are a variety of valid ways to be church, and I have been blessed to companion many of them as either a leader or consultant.

Over time and informed by experiences in diverse ministry settings, I have created an organizational assessment and strategic planning process that supports and promotes sustainable models of community development and renewal. This is begun by assessing both the organizational needs and the emotional system needs. In every case, this dual process identifies the circumstances and needs unique to each community through community engagement, consultation, leadership development and guidance. Throughout every aspect of the assessment and planning process, people are invited to reflect on their lived relationship with God and thereby identify their sense of vision for the future as informed by that relationship. I believe

Essay Responses: The Rev. Rachel K. Taber-Hamilton

that I am equipped to do this work and feel called to do so as a bishop serving and supporting the efforts of the people in a diocese, because I see organizational assessment and planning as one of the central roles and ministries of a bishop.

My own relationship with God has called me into places and communities that are actively seeking to identify and actualize new or renewed ways of being faithful to values of inclusivity, justice, service, and the nurture of God's Creation. This path for me has included participating at many levels of our Church organization in order to understand it from the inside out. My perspective on this is that if one is to be the captain of a ship (as a bishop may be to a diocese) one needs to gain the experiential learning of what is required for supporting a variety of congregational models. Additionally, I believe that a bishop must have a lived understanding of how our church governance operates at every level of the organization, in order to best represent and meet the needs of the diocese. My national level ministries have provided opportunities to work collaboratively with bishops from several dioceses, including my own, as well as with staff from the Presiding Bishop's Office and leaders within the wider Anglican Communion. I bring broad and proven experience to the episcopate.

We are a unique Church in the world, and our identity makes us a critical partner within the Anglican Communion. At the end of the day, the most valuable resource we have is one another. In that vein, I believe that our global Communion is a vital international network within the human community that is committed to striving for deeper connection and understanding in a world that seems at risk of increasing isolationism and nativism. On your behalf, I can bring this perspective to our Province of the Communion and to the Communion as a whole.

In my experience and assessment, I believe that the episcopacy of our domestic church must be dedicated to fostering the values of God's Kingdom within each diocese, within The Episcopal Church as an international entity itself and within the world-wide Communion. Witnessing to God's love is a quality of evangelism to which bishops are especially called, and we certainly see that in our Presiding Bishop. As the Church, we are collectively faced with significant challenges in this period of our corporate life. I believe that I can bring effective and healthy leadership to help meet those challenges as a bishop of the Church. As the bishop of the Diocese of Maine, I would be working with a diocese that is already committed to meeting these challenges of our new reality.

To me, this is a God-given time of great potential. Episcopal leadership has an opportunity and responsibility to help identify creative responses that will value our traditions while strengthening The Episcopal Church for a sustainable future. The episcopacy provides the opportunity of working with the people of a diocese to effect significant systemic change collaboratively, quickly and holistically. Along with the pastoral work of nurturing God's people and stewarding diocesan resources, I feel called to the work of shepherding the Diocese of Maine as a community of faith expressing the creative nature of the Church through the generative spirit of its people.

2) What attracts you to the idea of being the 10th Bishop of Maine?

There are several factors noted within the Diocesan Profile that I find compelling and motivate me to explore a call to the episcopacy in Maine.

As presented in the diocesan profile, the Diocese of Maine is committed to adaptive change. I appreciate processes that promote creative problem solving and community dialog, and this is clearly central to your processes. Sustainability is a topic that is critical for me both in my love for the natural environment and in my love for the Church. Therefore, I would consider it a gift to be part of your journey as your bishop.

In fact, the Diocese of Maine Profile highlights a diocesan-wide commitment to several values, including hospitality, welcome, inclusion, helping neighbors, resourcefulness, social justice and human rights, all of which are important values in my ministry.

With you, I value our commitment as a tradition of the “Middle Way” to ever-broaden the brackets of our collective community to include all of God’s people. I am committed to the tenets of civil discourse, and, therefore, I do not separate myself from those with whom I disagree. My hope is that if we are mutually committed to being in relationship, then we will say what is on our hearts with compassion and respect for one another. Having lived in Maine myself, I admire the independent spirit of Mainers that manifests in daily life in just about every possible way. No matter what disagreements there may be, when it comes to a bad snow storm or hard times, there really isn’t anything you wouldn’t do for each other. That’s my dream place to be.

Your diocesan Profile notes that the state of Maine has one of the highest percentages (“greater than 50 percent”) of un-churched residents in the United States. The state in which I am currently serving as a rector records that 77 percent of our residents are un-churched and answer “none” to the survey question, “What is your religion?” Like Washington state, Maine is a part of our nation’s “None Zone.” I enjoy living and working in the None Zone, because I think the “Nones” are people who appreciate thinking for themselves and are not satisfied with a superficial level of engagement, and I believe that my experience here is transferable from Washington to Maine in this regard. For people in the None Zone, actions especially speak louder than words, and I am never hesitant to lead meaningful action or bear meaningful witness through an evangelism that is authentic and makes a difference in the life of the wider community. Such witness through action is reflective of the Baptismal Covenant as well as the instruction of St. Francis of Assisi, who said to his brothers, “Go into that village and preach the Gospel. If necessary, use words.”

In 2004, a congregation in my diocese came under great duress when its leadership determined to remove it from The Episcopal Church. Beginning in 2006, I was called to serve as the rector for the remaining Episcopalians. I led them through a process of post-organizational trauma recovery. Within the first 8 months, our membership grew from 12 members to 80. The people were willing to engage a pastoral process of mutual community discernment and gradually felt freed from the need of having to recreate what they had known. I see a similar willingness shared in your diocesan profile to identify and explore new possibilities. Subsequently, I know that I can help your communities, and I very much want to do so. As an experienced community builder and organizational developer, I would serve you as an informed and skilled bishop.

Essay Responses: The Rev. Rachel K. Taber-Hamilton

As I read your diocesan profile, I see the recognition that in order to live into new ways of being church, your hearts and minds need to be open. The labor of communal and organizational change is work that inspires me and evokes my passion for helping people discover and realize their communal vision for mission. I enjoy the work related to organizational and community development. I love to support the people who are living and envisioning their way through those processes. I am attracted to the Diocese of Maine, because I believe that I can help you and can be of service to you in the significant transformative time which your diocese is experiencing, especially because you recognize the need for that work. As I read your profile, I viscerally experience the desire to roll up my sleeves and get in the trenches there with you, as a friend and as a leader who can be of knowledgeable assistance to your work and efforts.

During the time I lived in Maine, I served as a supply priest in your diocese, while I worked as the full-time Director of Pastoral Care for the several campuses of MaineGeneral. It was during that time that I first felt a call to the episcopate. I recognized that I needed to return to serving full-time in the parish setting. I accepted a call to be rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Everett, WA, where I have been proactive and intentional in seeking every opportunity to serve in each facet of leadership open to me in our Church. I am committed to being the best bishop that I can be, so I have taken it upon myself over many years to learn through experience by serving the needs of my diocese, province, our Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. When I learned that the Diocese of Maine had opened the search for its next bishop, I heard the Spirit's call to serve in that capacity.

Finally, as an indigenous person active in indigenous ministries of The Episcopal Church, I am aware and a very appreciative of your diocesan commitment to being in a positive relationship with the Wabanaki people and other First Nations of Maine.

In many, many ways, I have walked the talk of adaptive change – it is hard work and not simply academic words on paper to me. I know the Church as a living organism, and I am committed to honoring the Spirit of its diverse people, expanding its collective heart and love for one another, and ensuring that the people of the Church live into a sustainable and faithful future. I believe that the sum of my professional and personal experience can benefit the Diocese of Maine. The prospect of walking with your diocese fills me excitement; it would feel like coming home.

Essay Responses: The Rev. Rachel K. Taber-Hamilton

3) What does being the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement mean to you and your ministry?

In the Gospel of Matthew, “Galilee” represents the World. With Mary Magdalene, as witnesses to Christ’s resurrection we are to go out from the empty tomb and into the living streets of our cities, to our hospitals, rural communities, and offices to encounter the living Christ who has already gone there ahead of us.

The world needs to know in every generation that there is a God who loves us, a God who will not let us go, and that love can set us all free. For me, this is the Jesus Movement, and we The Episcopal Church are a lively and vital branch of that movement in this world. For The Episcopal Church, following Jesus into a loving, liberating, life-giving relationship with God and with each other is the summary of the law Jesus gave to us.

I’m aware that since The Most Rev. Michael Curry preached at the royal wedding in May of 2018, he has become a very public witness for The Episcopal Church on the world stage. I thank God for that, and I am grateful for his very public witness to the transformative and uniting power of God’s love. We are all called to bear such a message through our thoughts, words and deeds; this is what it means to be a part of the Jesus Movement.

Based on the priorities established at The General Convention of 2015, Bishop Curry has stated that the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement includes three mission priorities as “three pillars” that are founded on our institutional structures. The three pillars are: 1) Racial Reconciliation & Justice (relating to others through love), 2) Evangelism (speaking and doing God’s love in the world), and 3) Environmental Stewardship (caring for Creation as loving action towards all that God has made). To me, these priorities support and identify the current focus of our branch of the Jesus Movement.

Bishop Curry has recently provided an example for us of what living into the three Movement priorities looks like. Only a few weeks before the royal wedding, Bishop Curry participated in the creation of the statement, “Reclaiming Jesus: A Confession of Faith in A Time of Crisis.” The statement was the product of a retreat held on Ash Wednesday of 2018, during which Christian leaders representing the diversity of Christian and political spectrums in our nation met to address practices and policies of our time that “dangerously corrode the soul of the nation and deeply threaten the public integrity of our faith.” For Episcopalians, the statement is also saying that we must respond publically with the courage of love. On the same evening that the statement writers held a candlelight vigil at the nation’s capital, I led a candlelight service in solidarity with them at my church during which the Reclaiming Jesus statement was read.

I believe that being in the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement means having the courage to go out into the public arena, especially in this challenging time. When it comes to expressing our faith, Episcopalians in general aren’t really used to being very extraverted about their faith. However, being a part of the Jesus movement includes being willing to march in the streets; it means advocating for the stranger; it means supporting the poor and the homeless; it means walking beside those who hunger for social justice and legislative reform; and it means responding to the needs of the marginalized and oppressed by using our voices and actions to make love real for all people and for all Creation.

Essay Responses: The Rev. Rachel K. Taber-Hamilton

Faithful action takes us beyond the doors of our churches and into the world, which is precisely where Christ calls us to go. From my own ministry, I know that being an Episcopalian in the Jesus Movement can take us into the halls of our capitals and court rooms. It can take us into the political centers of our world as much as it takes us into places where we minister to, “the poor and the oppressed...the unemployed and the destitute...the prisoners and captives...[as well as] all who remember and care for them.” (BCP 384)

My ministry engages work informed by all three pillars of the Jesus Movement (evangelism, reconciliation and care of creation). I have walked beside people who represent many faiths, cultures and perspectives. I have marched with members of my parish and state in solidarity with women, with the churched and unchurched who seek environmental justice and recognition of the validity of science. I have spoken on behalf of immigrants and refugees and helped represent their voices to those in state and local government. Last year and this year, I have been a keynote speaker for our local People’s Summit, representing The Episcopal Church and my congregation. I have led my current church from a place of silence on the human rights of LGBTQ people to our church choir performing for annual Pride celebrations for which we sponsored a booth for share about our the commitment to inclusivity of our church and faith.

The Jesus Movement challenges us to be authentic as Christians. Evangelism, as understood within the Jesus Movement, is the work of listening for Christ in our lives and in the world. All the work of advocacy that I have led or of which I have been a part includes recognizing and proclaiming the Word of God that is freedom and love. Through preaching and writing, I have worked hard to inspire the people of God to service and social justice. Through special liturgies, Sunday worship and prayer, I have sought to gather the community around Christ. Through creating adult education curricula, I have helped equip our members for evangelism in the world beyond our church doors through their actions, conversations and treatment of others.

In the work of reconciliation, I am committed to embodying the loving, liberating and life-giving ways of Christ. I have led and participated in interfaith dialog between Jews, Muslims and Christians both in my diocese and on specially-designed pilgrimages to the Holy Land. I serve on the Pilgrimage Task Force of the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (AFEDJ). I have served in domestic and international work groups dedicated to the principals of restorative justice for indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand, Torres Island Straights, Canada, Hawaii, Israel and in the United States. Within the work of reconciliation, I have been a truth teller, a public speaker and a writer.

With regard to the care of Creation, I have been active in environmental concerns as part of a life-long spiritual practice and belief in the sacred nature of humanity’s relationship with and responsibility for stewarding all God’s creatures. I am leading my current congregation through a process of developing a holistic year-round stewardship plan that includes projects concerned with local eco-ministries, church-wide eco-justice initiatives around addressing issues of climate change, national parks stewardship, and working with community partners to create and teach strategies for sustainable living. My personal blog, Greening Spirit, seeks to keep readers informed and engaged in creation care as faith practice.

This is an exciting time to be an Episcopalian – the inspiration that comes from being a part of the Jesus Movement is truly transformative. I pray that this may be true for all of us.