

THREE ESSAY QUESTIONS

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May 2018

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

The aspects of my vocation which direct me most clearly toward the Episcopate are my love of communities, my experience with a great variety of Episcopal congregations, and my experience as a leader and administrator.

In my years as a parish priest, I discovered that I love not only individuals in the congregations which I have served, but also the congregations themselves, as distinctive communities. Congregations are complex organisms, communities in which followers of Jesus practice receiving and sharing God's love. The most courageous work we do in the body of Christ is to tend and renew relationships, guiding and supporting people as they wound and forgive, disappoint and delight one another. In a culture where divisiveness seems increasingly prevalent, congregations are havens of hope, not because they are filled with perfect people – or people who agree with one another about everything – but because they are filled with people who practice love. Nurturing these relationships and tending communities, “guarding the faith, unity and discipline of the Church,” – this is the work of a bishop, and the work to which I am called.

As canon to the ordinary, I strengthen and encourage a great variety of congregations. Each congregation is unique, with its own history and trajectory, its own sorrows and joys, its own synergistic connections with other communities. Today, most congregations face challenges posed by seismic shifts in our wider culture, which is forcing overhaul of many ministries, and even many assumptions about ministry. The ways in which congregations engage this challenge, however, rise from the uniqueness of their context, skills and resources. It is always a privilege for me to join congregations on their journey, hear their concerns and hopes, remind them of God's abiding love, and inspire them to move forward in faith. As bishop – “chief priest and pastor” – I would be commissioned to continue this important work of partnering with clergy and lay people to envision and embrace New Life.

At first glance, my work as a leader and administrator in the Church might not seem noteworthy – I help lead individuals and groups to meet their goals and I make sure that stuff gets done. The particular ways in which I lead and administer are very intentional – and successful. *I lead inclusively, with clarity of vision.* I lift up voices of all, and facilitate the use of everyone's gifts. Often these gifts take us farther down the road than we might have originally imagined – and sometimes in new directions. *I administer by building bridges.* Administration can be accomplished in a variety of ways. I administer by facilitating the building of bridges – bridges between people, bridges within the Church, bridges between the Church and the world. These bridges allow ideas and resources to be exchanged. They allow responsibilities to be shared. When we build bridges, we increase our capacity to respond gracefully and creatively to

the unexpected. As your bishop, I would be charged to partner in leadership of the diocese and in stewardship of its resources. By grace, God has granted me the gifts to fulfill this call.

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

I have very limited interest in “being a bishop” in the abstract. It is the “incarnation” of the Episcopate as envisioned by the people of the Diocese of Maine that I find attractive!

The spiritual health of the Diocese of Maine is notable and compelling. It shines through to me in your profile and in the first-hand stories I have heard about your congregations. The bishops who have served you as faithful shepherds have left a legacy of wholeness and an atmosphere of hopefulness. With experience in both very healthy and very broken systems in the Church, I am well prepared to lead the Diocese of Maine from strength to strength spiritually, as we work together to courageously and creatively to engage the array of practical challenges that congregations are facing in the twenty first century.

I find three things in your diocesan profile that resonate strongly with my call to ministry: your candor, your creativity, and your clear love for each other and your neighbors.

Your profile has a particularly beautiful candor. I know that Mainers are renowned for their candor. But the candor in your profile seems to have two sources: humble self-awareness that takes the call of God seriously but yourselves not *too* seriously and deep care about relationships with each other, your neighbors and the earth. Diversity and welcome have become buzz-words in The Episcopal Church, but when you use these words in your profile, you tell the reader what you mean by them. You share that you are diverse in terms of theology and socio-economics, but not very racially diverse. You share that you are open and affirming to all and that one of the specific ways in which you welcome people is to show newcomers how to navigate the liturgy. In this, I hear that you build life-giving relationships. You are willing to do the hard work that relationships require. I find this attractive because, in my experience, expectations of quick-fixes for our faith communities often impede investment in relationships, which take a while to take root and to flourish.

The second attractive aspect of your profile is its emphasis on creativity. You are deeply aware that one size does not fit all. A liturgical style which is life-giving in one congregation, might be off-putting in another. Outreach efforts which bring neighbors together in one community, might be viewed as partisan and divisive in another. The “Maine spirit” which leads you to look out for one another has also inspires you to acknowledge communities and people “as they are.” Too often, people sidestep true acceptance, because doing so requires them to be flexible in ways that are uncomfortable. However, the generosity of wholehearted acceptance is loving witness and *true* welcome.

Another aspect of creativity that you reference is creative use of resources. I grew up on small farm in eastern Washington state, and I am well acquainted with the phrase, “use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.” I take living with limited resources as a challenge, *not as a sign*

of unfaithfulness or failure. In the midst of cultural change and shifting demographics, congregations face shortfalls – in funds, in membership, in able-bodied people to help hang the garlands at Christmastime, and more. Persistent lack of resources can leave us feeling frustrated and depressed, which can make it hard to hear the Good News: God is with us and will help us do what we are called to do. *Not just anything we want to do, but what we are called to do.* Sometimes we long for things that are not to be. It would be an honor to face challenges with you, to mourn with you that which is not to be, and to celebrate surprising opportunities in the midst of the challenges you face.

The third attractive aspect of your profile is the clear love that Episcopalians in the Diocese of Maine have for each other and for their neighbors. The thread running through the Faith in Maine podcasts is love for the people in your communities and for the natural beauty in your State. You love the place so much that you put up with mud season! This grounding love (pun intended!) is a sure foundation for not merely the present, but also the future. As I read and listen to your stories about transformational ministries, I think, “Wow! In the face of challenges, you are getting stronger, not giving up.” Your efforts bring this verse from 1 John 4 to mind, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love casts out fear . . .” I have partnered with many congregations to discern ways forward in difficult circumstances. Loss and change are real and bring with them grief and sorrow that may seem too much to bear. In this passage, John is *not* saying that if we are strong enough we will not have any fear. John is saying that the more we love, the more fear recedes, for love takes us into new life, to places where heaven touches earth, here and now.

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

In calling us “the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement,” Presiding Bishop Curry challenges us to celebrate *whose* we are, *who* we are, and *what* we are called to do. Being the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement” means that we belong to Jesus, we are not alone, and we are called to *move*.

To be the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement means to follow the one to whom the Movement belongs. We follow Jesus, only Jesus, always Jesus. We follow Jesus because Jesus is *worthy* of being followed; he was faithful even through death, to resurrection. We follow Jesus because, in him God put on human flesh. Jesus showed us how to be the feet and voice and hands of God – how to go where we are called; how to invite all types and sorts of people and to proclaim the good news; how to heal, help and bless all persons whom we meet.

To say that we are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement is to acknowledge that we are not alone. We have been grafted into the Vine, and we draw our life from the very lifeblood of God. As the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement, we Episcopalians are merely one of many branches which are grafted into the *same* Vine. One branch is not more right than the other, nor more deserving of God’s love. The health of each branch is dependent upon the health of others. The other branches are not in competition with us for scarce resources, for our supply is

God's unlimited being. As Jesus demonstrated with the loaves and fishes, there is always enough of God to go around – with more to spare!

To call ourselves the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement is to remind ourselves and others that our world needs a movement today. Movement to justice. Movement to peace. Movement to reconciliation. Movement to care for creation. To call ourselves the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement is to commit to move – now! The problems that we face are so big, the oppression so entrenched, that we must tackle them together, in a *movement* that is larger than any single group or race or creed or region. As a child growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, I was taught that all the “movements” had already happened. Slaves were free, women had the vote, and segregation was outlawed. But we live now in a new season. The veils over our eyes have been lifted. We are confronted with the reality that injustice and oppression were never fully overcome – but only moved to the margins and forced underground, embedded in the systems of daily life, infused in the air we breathe in our culture.

What being part of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement means to me and to my ministry is that our call is renewed and refocused. Back to the basics! Now, in our time, we must lift up the lowly, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit those in prison, and resist the temptation to take more when others have little. *This* is what it means to follow Jesus. ‘No turning back, Lord; no turning back!’