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Bishop Search in the Episcopal Diocese of Idaho

Responses to the *Essay Questions for Nominees*

Question 1 Since its inception, the Mission Statement of the Episcopal Diocese of Idaho has resonated throughout this Diocese. I’ve used it many times in sermons and have heard it quoted many times in casual conversation. It just fits well who we are as Episcopalians in Idaho. I am inspired by this Statement most however because it so well reflects the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It calls each of us to live into our Baptismal Covenant and embrace the incarnational ministry of Jesus in our congregations, our diocese, and in our lives.

In my opinion, this Mission Statement is one of the crowning contributions of Bishop Harry Bainbridge to the Diocese of Idaho. While the Bishop worked with a small committee, of which I was apart, to craft this Statement, it really reflects the Bishop’s vision. He deserves full credit for it. Without his leadership I honestly doubt it would have been created.

In my understanding, a great mission statement does two things: It affirms the identity of a group, grounding them in their authentic vocation, while calling them to deeper commitment to that vocation. This Mission Statement is inspiring because it clearly expresses our essential ministry as a church: We are about the work of Jesus! If you read the Gospels you can see numerous examples how Jesus’ heart was open to people. Likewise, his incarnate love is most visible as his hands reach out and touch lepers, sinners, and those marginalized by their religion and society. Likewise, this Mission Statement calls us forward when we neglect to live like Jesus, and do in our world what Jesus did in his.

Many of the struggles we have in the church today are precisely over who the church of Jesus Christ should and should not embrace. Many Episcopal dioceses are split, some seeking even to leave the Episcopal Church altogether, over this issue. When our Mission Statement proclaims, *We are one in Baptism*, we are challenged to move beyond our schismatic tendencies and to embrace a unity which is greater than the issues that threaten to fracture us. It should be noted, that there have been no congregations within this Diocese, as there have in many others, who have tried to secede from the Episcopal Church. I believe this Mission Statement, and the Bishop’s clear leadership in this area, get much of the credit for this.

Because this Mission Statement so authentically reflects who we are in this Diocese, I do not believe it will need revision anytime in the foreseeable future. If I were bishop, I would continue to live into this clearly articulated Mission Statement.

Question 2 My current role as Dean of St. Michael's Cathedral is rigorous, and requires a significant amount of my emotional, spiritual, and physical energy. I am also a husband, and father of three young adults, and want to be present with my family in a life-giving way. I am absolutely committed to being the most loving and faithful husband and father that I can be. In my home and family I find both refuge and renewal. At times however both church and family can be places of stress, and I find it necessary to seek balance between my commitments and pleasures.

I understand Christian *salvation* to mean that through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God has established a place of intersection between our holiness and wholeness. In other words, divine goodness and human integrity come together in and through Christ. To borrow from our liturgy, through Jesus Christ things earthly and things heavenly are made one. This means to me that through Holy Baptism we are given the freedom to participate in the divine life of Christ, and live with integrity among our families, friends, and communities.

One of my spiritual disciplines is to know what to let go of and what to embrace, and the wisdom to know the difference! The church is a community of people, called by Christ, to a life of discipleship. A leader in the church doesn't need to (and can't) do it all. For me, one key to finding balance between my role as church leader, and that of family member (my "personal and professional life", if you will) is to trust that the Holy Spirit is empowering a whole community of people to be the church, where we all have an important role. In order to discern my role in various activities within the church, I find it helpful to have a close circle of trusted friends to whom I can turn for advice, counsel and feedback.

I get great joy by spending significant time in biblical study and reflection, and believe that the greatest source of authority for Anglican Christians is the Holy Scripture. I also enjoy my role as teacher, and find that teaching, particularly the Bible is something that feeds my soul.

Since coming to Idaho in 1998, I have come to love the awesome and vast outdoor resources that we Idahoans enjoy. I find great solitude in being in campgrounds, ski areas, and wilderness places in Idaho, and the opportunities there to connect with God's creation. For me being in the wild places of Idaho is a way of communing with the Creator and seeking balance this demanding world.

Finally, my faith is centered in the worship and prayer of the church. Worship is where I encounter the presence of Christ, and find strength to meet the demands of life. Prayer enables me to hear the voice of God, and live with integrity.

Question 3 My leadership style is complex. Often, when working with the Cathedral Clergy and Staff, I will engage them in a conversation around a particular issue. In the near future, we will be meeting to envision how we can more effectively minister to our growing twenty and thirty something population. I'm excited about the energy and ideas that will come out of that discussion, and the implementation of some of those ideas. Sometimes however issues emerge that require a quick, informed, or executive decision, and I am aware that the buck stops with me.

At the core of my leadership style is the belief that Christ gives each of us the gifts necessary to build up the Body of Christ. In hiring clergy and staff at St. Michael's I look for talented, committed people who can provide creative leadership in their particular area. I do not seek people who are just like me, or who even agree with me. In fact, my conviction is that the church needs to have a great appreciation for unique and diverse gifts. I encourage my staff to be creative, and to delve into new areas of ministry, and provide guidance when necessary. Since I hire good people, I rest assured that they will do good work. I feel it is especially important to express to my team that they are valued colleagues, and I meet with them on a regular basis to check in. In a multi-staff setting, such as St. Michael's, the Cathedral Clergy and Staff are essential to carrying out our mission, and I tell them so often. As bishop, it would be very important to me to work closely with diocesan clergy and staff, and do all in my power to help them be successful in their ministries.

One of my gifts is in seeking future leadership for the church. The recent hiring of Canon Lucas Grubbs is a good example of this. I met Lucas in 2003 when he was doing his clinical training at St. Luke's Regional Medical Center. Because I saw in Lucas a talented future priest with unique gifts, I asked him, at that time, to consider coming back to Idaho and working at St. Michael's. While I knew it would be a few years before Lucas was finished with his academic formation, I also wanted to sow seeds for the future. After all, people do move on and it's important for me to have fine clergy at St. Michael's. When our former Canon, Alice Farquhar Mayes notified me that she might be moving onto another position, I immediately began a search. Within two weeks time I had put together a list of four, qualified candidates, each with unique gifts. Two of them were women, and two men. During this time I had managed to locate Lucas, who was looking for his first full time position, having completed two graduate degrees at Berkeley Yale, one in Emerging Church Worship. As it turned out, Lucas and his wife Meredith wanted very much to come back to Idaho.

It is significant to note that Lucas brings very different gifts from mine. Lucas is an avowed Anglo-Catholic, while I am an avowedly somewhat lower than he! I believe however that celebrating diversity within the church is an important value. The different gifts each of us brings (and I would expand this to my whole Cathedral team) is enriching and valuable. As bishop, I would work diligently to ensure that the Diocese of Idaho seeks, cultivates, and trains fine leadership for ministry, lay and ordained.

Question 4

It is often said, “A bishop is for the whole church.” While the priestly vocation is most often associated with parish ministry, episcopal ministry has its locus throughout the diocese, and beyond. As chief pastor, the bishop has responsibility for providing spiritual oversight for a whole diocese, and being *pontiff* or bridge for the people of God.

As the Chief Pastor to the clergy of the diocese, I believe it is important for a bishop to be present in a supportive manner with all the clergy. I can say without hesitation that a positive and collegial relationship with one’s bishop is a valuable and life-giving gift to diocesan clergy. The opposite is also true. As bishop I would spend a great deal of time building relationships with the clergy and people throughout the Diocese of Idaho. Episcopal leadership is rarely effective from a distance, and visionary leadership is built on trust, mutuality and honesty.

Given the controversial times in which we minister, it is very important for a bishop to *share with his/her fellow bishops in the government of the whole church* (BCP, p.518). While this may seem optional to many in a diocese, perhaps even an expensive luxury, I’ve come to believe that it is invaluable for a diocesan bishop to fully participate in the House of Bishops. The pastoral statements that our bishops make help clarify many of the complex issues of our day. Likewise, I note, with sadness, that in those dioceses that are seeking to withdraw from the Episcopal Church, their bishops have neglected this part of their episcopate, in some cases for many years.

I believe that a bishop has a special obligation to affirm, and commit to living within the core doctrines and dogmas of the Church. Whereas all the clergy and people are expected to *continue in the Apostle’s teaching* (BCP, p.304), a bishop is called to *guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church* (BCP, p.517). It is always important to deepen our understanding of the faith. As Thomas Aquinas said, we should use our faith always to seek deeper understanding. Yet I do not believe that a bishop has the freedom to discount or ignore the essential teachings of the Church, including those ecclesial traditions which are important to our Anglican polity. It is integral to the vocation of a bishop to creatively proclaim those teachings of the Christian faith as codified in the Nicene Creed.

Given the unique role of a bishop as the one who ordains priests and deacons, I would refer to Question 3 here. I would spend a great deal of time cultivating clergy leadership within the Diocese of Idaho. Since my seminary days, with more than twenty years of ordained ministry, having served in four very different dioceses, I believe I have very good skills and experience in this area.

Question 5

The first thing that is non-negotiable for me is the safety and security of people at church. There is nothing more corrosive to the community of faith than abuses of power. Given some of our history, and the current situation in another Christian denomination, I believe it is essential to have systems and guidelines of accountability in every congregation.

Secondly, the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church are non-negotiable for me. Just as the Constitution of the U. S. is often the final determinant in complex societal issues, the Church's Constitution and Canons are essential for our common life. A bishop is elected, ordained, and consecrated according to our Constitution and Canons, and needs to stand clearly within that framework. If one has disagreement with this framework, the democratic nature of our church does allow for change to occur.

Finally, I believe that every member of a diocese has a right to speak their truth and have their voice be counted. While a vote or consensus, following discussion or debate, may or may not be affirm an individual's view, everyone in the church has a right to be heard.

Within the past month, at St. Michael's, we held what we called "A 9:15 Worshipper's Consultation". This was, in effect, a time to check in with our 9:15 A.M. Sunday worshippers. While it is impossible to predict what kind of feedback might come out of such a meeting, I've learned that it's usually constructive to create an environment in which people can speak forthrightly and share their opinions. In fact, this particular meeting, which included over fifty people, was just filled with amazingly creative ideas. Over time, we are likely to implement many of these ideas. I'm also guessing that others we will choose not to implement in the end. However, it was invaluable for members of our 9:15 congregation to have an environment in which everyone could say whatever they wished, knowing that their ideas would be received, without judgment. If elected, I would work with the leadership of the Diocese of Idaho to foster this kind of an environment.