

1. As you read our diocesan profile, what most excites and challenges you about the possibility of serving as Bishop of the Diocese of San Diego?

I love your mission statement – following Jesus Christ is indeed a daring ministry that requires us to engage in fearless love for the world. This statement indicates that the Diocese of San Diego understands that following Jesus is not something we do for our own comfort or to ensure our eternal salvation (though salvation is a gift we gladly receive from God in Christ). Rather, following Jesus requires us to invest our hearts and souls, sometimes at risk to ourselves, for the sake of the good news of God’s kingdom. The risks we take may be slight compared to the martyrs of the early church (and present-day martyrs in other parts of the world), but they are nevertheless real. Following Jesus requires us to leave places where we are comfortable and enter into both the joy and the suffering of the world. I also delight in your vision statement, which talks about relentless mission work, and about relational evangelism, inclusion, and reconciliation. I would gladly join in sharing with you in removing barriers and borders in our society, and working to achieve this vision.

The profile describes a vibrant diocese that is deeply involved in social justice, outreach, and ministry to refugees and others in need. It is located in a highly diverse area of the country, adjacent to the Mexican border, with many opportunities for evangelism and mission among the vital and fast-growing Latino/a population, as well as the growing overall population of a major US city and region. I am very interested in serving a diocese with these qualities – passion for service to others and many opportunities for growth. I am especially interested in the commitment you expressed to increasing the diversity of the diocese. Evangelism with non-dominant populations requires considerable dedication and willingness to allocate money, time, and energy at the diocesan level. This is an area that I have made a priority in my current ministry, and would enjoy continuing that priority in collaboration with Episcopalians in San Diego.

Your profile indicates that the lay and clergy leaders of the diocese are open to change and would like a bishop and diocesan staff who equip them for growth, help them reach new members, build up congregations that are struggling, and help determine context-appropriate regional ministry strategies. These are all areas I have made a particular focus in my present position, and they are vitally important for the future mission of the Episcopal Church. I am passionate about helping reticent Episcopalians learn to talk about their faith and invite others to share what we have found in our church. I deeply believe that our Episcopal church benefits from theology and practices that can speak God’s truth in a way that the world needs to hear. I pray that if I were called as the next bishop of San Diego, that we would collaborate to find innovative ways to follow Jesus together, and grow the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement in this vibrant region of California.

2. Tell us about a personal experience of cultural challenge and/or reconciliation. How did it affect you?

During my field education placement during seminary, I served at a parish that had a ministry to Latino day laborers (all were men, so the “Latino” name is accurate). The town council had received complaints about laborers waiting along the main street for employers to choose them for jobs. The town asked this church if they would consolidate the ministry in their parking lot, and the church agreed. Volunteers from the church would arrive at 5:30 a.m. to hand out numbers to laborers, and employers who arrived were required to choose laborers in order, eliminating the competitions that would sometimes happen for jobs. The church also provided coffee and light breakfast.

The ministry was a source of controversy within the church, which was deeply divided along liberal/conservative lines. At the time, I had little experience with Latino ministries and little knowledge of the day labor situation with which many undocumented immigrants lived. I had some concerns about the church facilitating illegal employment, even at the request of the town council (this concern was the main source of the controversy among conservatives within the parish). However, I began participating in the ministry and learning more about how some of these folks lived. Some slept outside; some shared tiny apartments with numerous other men. Most had families in their home countries to whom they sent most of their earnings. Many went without breakfast and lunch, other than what the church and unusually generous employers provided. I began to listen to their stories and realize the huge distances they had come and the terrible risks they had taken to support their families back home. I also began to compare their lives to my own, which has never included such risks or such poverty, and to understand my own good fortune as an American.

For me, this ministry was no longer a source of controversy over its legal status; it became an urgent matter of faith. When Jesus said that he could be found in the least of his brothers and sisters, surely these migrant day laborers were among the people he meant. Church for me had always been a source of comfort and a place to experience transcendence. This ministry helped me understand that while those comforting, holy church experiences will always be true and essential, church also involves loving our neighbors even when it is risky. This ministry was risky for the church, which was the subject of numerous attacks in the local press even though it was doing the ministry at the request of the town council (and the ministry has since ceased to exist as attacks on immigrants grew more severe over the years).

For me, the holiness of church and the ministry on the margins came together on Ash Wednesday that year, as I participated in a Spanish service and discovered just how deeply those ancient words and beautiful liturgy touched the hearts of these men who suffered so much. I felt my own repentance strongly that year.

3. In a time when some see the church in decline, how do you plan to help the church flourish in the 21st century?

The narrative of church decline is absolutely correct if one focuses on attendance and membership numbers: the Episcopal Church is half the size it was at its height in the 1960s, while the US population has grown dramatically since then. Decades of wealth and

complacency allowed Episcopalians to assume that their strength and power would always persist with no particular efforts on their part. Decline in numbers was inevitable as the world shifted and as church membership (especially Episcopal church membership) was no longer a social advantage.

Elaine Heath calls this decline a “dark night of the soul” for the mainline church in America. But she continues:

But the history of God’s people is a history of life cycles, a history of clarity about call and identity, followed by complacency, followed by collusion with the powers, followed by catastrophic loss. Contrary to being a disaster, the exilic experiences of loss and marginalization are what are needed to restore the church to its evangelistic place.

According to Heath (and I agree), this narrative of decline can be seen as a true opportunity for Christian ministry. The end of Christendom means that we can no longer afford to be complacent and wait for people to walk through our doors. (Or, in a metaphor I have heard applied to the Episcopal Church, we can no longer afford to set a small, beautifully appointed aquarium right next to an ocean full of multitudes of fish, and wait for a few fish to jump in.) Instead, we must discover what true Christian discipleship means, and how we are to act as followers of Jesus in the world. In today’s post-Christendom world, we must do this work even when it is hard, risky, and counter-cultural. And this means that we need to help every Episcopalian discover how to be a minister and a missionary.

Contrary to the narrative of decline, I believe we are in a moment of change and opportunity. Throughout The Episcopal Church, I see an awakening of a new hunger for true discipleship, and for making a difference in the world by evangelism (proclaiming the good news of Christ) and reconciliation (bringing people of different backgrounds and views peacefully together). I have been privileged to be one leader in the movement toward this new orientation toward ministry and mission (I won’t be more specific about how, since you don’t want me to give you identifying markers in this essay). It is with enthusiasm that I plan to enter the next phase of my ministry (whatever that is), and continue helping empower Episcopalians for the new, challenging, exciting world we are entering. At a diocesan level, that means equipping and empowering lay and clergy leaders who are prepared to lead people into new forms of discipleship, and creating intentional strategies for evangelism and mission.

4. How does your ministry proclaim hope?

In the United States today, we seem to be in a period of profound despair. The political divisions that affect us so deeply arise from suspicion and mistrust on all sides (some of it justified). The divisions in the church mirror that wider societal despair, so that sometimes our only option seems to be to splinter into ever-smaller interest groups. The Christian faith, however, is based on hope. Hope is not the same as optimism, which is the belief that things will inevitably get better. Hope recognizes the darkness and yet places faith in God to bring light into darkness, light that the darkness can never overcome (John 1:5).

Hope means that God transforms death into resurrection, and resurrection is the sign that life, love, and reconciliation transcend death, hatred, and division. Hope, therefore, is what our world needs, and hope is what Christians proclaim in the good news of Christ.

That good news of Christ changes lives. When I was a young adult, I had a memorable encounter with Jesus Christ through the Episcopal Church, and it transformed the course of my life. I believe in the joy of life transformation that occurs as people discover Jesus and become his followers. I believe also that as people become disciples of Christ, they can continually grow in faith, love, and care for others. As we are transformed, we begin to transform the world around us, perhaps in small ways as we enact love in our families and neighborhoods, or perhaps in larger ways as we serve our communities and advocate for social justice. This transformation is our way of enacting the hope we have in Christ.

Evangelism for me is a matter not only of growing the church (though that is important, because our churches are sources of transcendence, ministry, community, and joy), but also of changing the world by forming new disciples. The main commitment of my lay and ordained ministry has been evangelism: proclaiming the good news of Christ through helping people learn to openly share their faith, and building congregations that form disciples and help transform their communities. I believe that committed disciples begin to live a life of hope. I pursue my ministry in the faith that God is not calling us to despair, or to complacency, or to gradual decline. Because the Holy Spirit is living and present in our church, God is calling us to hope. My ordained ministry proclaims this hope every day. My role in the church is to empower and equip leaders for ministry in their contexts. It is a role in which I find great joy, as I am continually inspired by the transformational ministries I see and support. In everything I do, I find profound reasons to trust in the Holy Spirit, who still enacts hope in all parts of our church and our world.