



The Rev'd Ken Ritter

Rector, Trinity Church in Baton Rouge

Family: Married to Julie; 2 daughters, Adelaide (15) and Elise (13)

Hometown: Born in New Orleans

Seminary: St. Joseph Seminary College and Notre Dame Graduate School of Theology

Pre-Collar Career: Healthcare executive and consultant

Tenure as a priest: I was received as a priest from the Roman Catholic Church and have been an Episcopal priest for 5 ½ years

Favorite Movie: *Forrest Gump*

Most Recently Read: *The Charlemagne Pursuit* by Steve Berry

Nominated by: The Rev'd Craig Dalferes (St. Matthew's, Houma); the Rev'd Henry Hudson (Trinity, New Orleans), Lynette Frazer (St. James Baton Rouge); and Deacon Charles deGravelles (Trinity, Baton Rouge)

What has led you to respond to this process for nomination to be the 11th Bishop of Louisiana?

I was first approached by others in our diocese — both clergy and lay — asking me to consider being nominated. This led me, initially, to discern a possible call. I thought and prayed considerably about what God's will may be for me and what gifts I might have to offer Him and our diocese as bishop. My wife and I also wrestled with the full implications for our family. I love this diocese, and am hopeful for its future. Sensing God's urging and wanting to be faithful to where He may perhaps be leading me, and with my family's blessing, I consented to nomination.

The work of a bishop is a tremendous responsibility. The bishop seeks to cast and share a vision for the diocese, ever striving to build the community of the faithful. Our diocese needs critical leadership in an uncertain time with many serious challenges ahead, particularly in fiscal management, continuing and developing new ministries, evangelization, organization and planning, the equipping of ministers and leadership, and clergy support.

Our present needs call for unique experience and skills.

I am exceptionally familiar with our Diocese of Louisiana — its culture, ministries, polity, and its clergy and people. I am a native of New Orleans and have spent most of my life in the area. I've spent more than 42 years living — *and ministering* — in every corner of our diocese (New Orleans, Metairie, Baton Rouge, Mandeville, Covington and Houma).

I have eight years of seminary training and hold master's degrees in divinity and administration.

I have extensive experience in the areas of pastoral care, social services, education, executive business and fiscal management, organizational turnarounds, visioning and strategic planning, development and fund-raising, marketing, and planning and care in natural disasters.

I have leadership experience in small, medium and large congregations.

My leadership and pastoral work in the Diocese of Louisiana have given me significant understanding of its strengths and needs. At present I serve as a Rector, as a member (and President) of the Diocesan Standing Committee, on the Diocesan Executive Board, as Dean of a Diocesan Deanery, as a Deputy to General Convention, and on the boards of two Episcopal schools. I served previously as Chair of the Diocesan Rebuilding Committee after Katrina, and as a member of the Solomon Center Board and the Episcopal Schools Commission.

My leadership style may best be described as collaborative and result-oriented. I work to establish consensus and enjoy building community and relationships. I value listening and the counsel of others. I am decisive, responsive, accessible and highly organized — I get things accomplished. I am a planner and visionary. I believe in accountability — which begins with me. I believe in honest and consistent communication. I am patient, non-anxious and strive to be pastoral and encouraging to others. I aspire to be a servant-leader.

I believe that my familiarity with our diocese and my experience would enable me to “hit the ground running”, moving swiftly to address our needs and lead our diocese into a brighter future.

Tell us about your relationship with God. What in your own spiritual practice feeds your life with God and Christ's church?

My relationship with God is rooted in a deep and abiding faith. It is based on ultimate trust in Him, His love and forgiveness for me, and my seeking always to do His will for me. I continue to be shaped by God and the life of His Church. I love our Episcopal Church and our Anglican Communion—in their strife and in their glory — and I feel called by God to be His minister and servant. The Book of Common Prayer is a treasured resource for me as a practice for Christian life, worship and ministry and I remain faithful to it.

Spiritually, I would describe myself as a committed Christian who strives to live in a way which is faithful to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, for it is through my participation in the life of Christ that I experience forgiveness and salvation. My spirituality and faith are:

- **Biblical** – The Holy Scriptures have full authority for me and form the basis in my journey in God and I strive to be faithful to them
- **Incarnational** – God became human that I might become more like the divine
- **Sacramental** – The sacraments are essential in my faith as outward signs of inward grace
- **Liturgical** – I am formed in worship of the divine, both in communal worship and private devotion
- **Prayerful** – Prayer is essential and is my ever-present connection with God. Communal prayer helps to shape my personal prayer
- **Pastoral** – Devotion to God in pastoral concern and service to my neighbors is vital
- **Mystical** – I am in a slow and wonderful journey to union with God

I am most faithful to God when I walk in a way which acknowledges that I am dependent upon Him and which allows His Spirit to guide me in my faith, my ministry and my life. In this walk I continually pray, “not my will but thy will be done” and in this walk I have grown to realize that when I let God guide me there is fulfillment—of His will and in me. As a minister, my awareness and understanding of grace and peace is constantly expanding.

My journey of faith has been a long and profound experience for me and I have been formed by many different experiences in my life. It has not always been easy by any means, but my journey in faith is truly my greatest blessing. It assures me that I am loved by Christ and it challenges and enables me to be Christ to others.

My relationship with God and His church has an immediacy that is fostered by a “rule of life” which includes regular prayer, meditation, worship and study.

In my personal spiritual discipline, I practice the following:

- Praying the daily office
- Regular worship and participation in the sacraments
- Study of Scripture
- Regular prayer and meditation
- Seeking spiritual direction
- Spiritual reading of classic and modern writers
- Taking an annual retreat

If elected, what would your “I have a dream” speech for the diocese of Louisiana consist of?

“You’ve got to have a dream... if you don’t have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true.”¹

Visioning starts with dreaming. I have a dream for our Diocese of Louisiana as a place **where**...

- We can have truthful dialogue about who we are and can be as a diocese, and that together we vision, plan and act for our future
- Our leadership team is diverse, of service, and is accountable — and holds others accountable
- We are financially viable rather than financially troubled
- We use our resources wisely
- Significant value is perceived for resources provided by congregations to the diocese
- Decisive action and results are the norm
- Congregations are properly equipped for ministry and the diocese serves the congregations
- We have excellent communication, accountability and transparency amongst us
- All are welcome and valued
- Congregations both small and large are valued and supported
- Our “catholicity” is evident and we are less congregational

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- We find our identity as one diocese and not competing communities within
- Our clergy are pastored and supported
- There is trust, affection, respect and healthy collegiality amongst the clergy
- We have a strong diaconate with a vision
- We are evangelizing and growing
- We continue and further develop the good work being accomplished in our diocese — such as the exciting and innovative ministries in our historic diocesan seat of New Orleans — and wherever and however God may call us to minister
- We have a preferential option for the poor, the outcast, those in need and who need Christ... and where the Episcopal Church continues to be a loud and prophetic voice
- We transcend being distracted by issues that would divide us so as to accomplish the work of Christ but also have honest dialogue with and listen to each other in areas where we disagree and hold each other in tension
- We conform to the primacy of scripture, and the unity, doctrine and worship of the Episcopal Church
- We practice ecumenism
- Our worship is rich and vibrant
- We minister effectively to our youth and draw younger people to our Church
- We have effective strategies for stewardship and the integration of newcomers

Dreams are, after all, dreams, and we must be realistic but also willing to stretch ourselves beyond what our grasp seems to be. We must be willing to exchange or conform our dreams of what we want into God's vision for what we can be.

There is a wonderful book entitled *So Great A Good*² which describes the significant impact that the Episcopal Church has had in Louisiana through much of its history. If we could continue this book today and write the chapters for our future, what would they reveal? Surely, it can be an even greater good!

We can work together to ensure that our diocese, which has accomplished so much in Louisiana, continues the good work of Jesus Christ.

¹ *South Pacific*, Rogers & Hammerstein, 1949

² Carter, Hodding & Betty Werlein, *So Great A Good - History of the Episcopal Church in Louisiana 1805-1955*, University Press of Kentucky, 1955.

What are the three most significant issues facing the Episcopal Church today? How do you see your leadership as it pertains to these issues?

I suggest that the three most significant issues are:

1. **Human sexuality.** Our Church is deeply divided particularly in regard to the ordination of persons (especially as bishops) who are in same-sex relationships, and the blessing of same-sex unions, in the Church.
2. **The future of the Anglican Communion.** Actions of the Episcopal Church and others in regard to the first issue have caused a severe rift in the Anglican Communion. The Windsor Report was issued and an Anglican Covenant has been proposed as attempts to hold the Communion together.
3. **A declining (shrinking) Episcopal Church and resources.** Membership, attendance and resources in the Episcopal Church (and Diocese of Louisiana) continue to decline.

I firmly intend to remain a member of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. I believe in the primacy and authority of Holy Scripture. I support the Windsor Report which requests that we not proceed to authorize rites for the blessing of same-sex unions and a moratorium on the consecration of bishops whose lifestyles present a difficulty for the wider Anglican Communion. I welcome consideration of an Anglican Covenant. I also maintain that all must be made to feel welcome and included in our Church.

Significant decisions affecting the practice and belief of the Communion should be made *in community*. The Communion is not of one mind on the first issue (cited above) and we need to show restraint in these matters as we discern together.

I would work to help us remain united in faith and hope as we chart our future together. We must have basic trust and a space where conflicts can be addressed, worked through and, if need be, lived with, but in a way which does not turn to destructiveness. I would promote dialogue and respect for each other and would also work with people across the Church to find a way forward together.

I have a strong record as an effective listener, communicator and coalition builder. My experience in leadership and managing conflict and crises has prepared me to listen non-anxiously, hear all sides of any conversation, provide an understanding of different perspectives, and to facilitate a healthy path forward.

Most importantly, I would work to keep us focused on the worship and work of Christ. While issues of human sexuality are important, they should not be our priority in Louisiana. As we say in Louisiana, "We have other fish to fry!"

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We have serious financial, organizational, and strategic challenges to address. We have hard decisions to make about our common life together. We need desperately to evangelize. Indeed, a spirit of cooperation — even while living in tension — can make all the difference as we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us to reach a hurting world.

I'd rather see headlines about the Episcopal Church making a difference in people's lives in Louisiana rather than what divides our church at present! Focusing on Christ's work will draw people to our Church. Focusing on what divides us will not.

How would you facilitate a renewal of the Great Commission in this diocese?

The Great Commission is not the “great suggestion”! It is a *command*. Evangelization is our means of harvesting God's field and is a key priority for a bishop.

Leadership as a bishop is an opportunity to help address the needs of people, direct their energies toward a common purpose, and draw their attention to something larger than themselves. Facilitating development and implementation of a vision, teaching, witnessing and providing resources and guidance are primary means.

We need a strategy for our entire Diocese of Louisiana, encompassing all its various needs, abilities and contexts.

As a diocese, we must:

- Evangelize with both a **mission** (what God wants accomplished) and **vision** (how to accomplish God's will in our context — how the end-product will look)
- Have congregations and ministries that are not just viable, but VITAL!
- Welcome all
- Be properly equipped
- Give example... be Christ visibly
- Challenge and love unconditionally
- Be a prophetic voice
- Go where people and needs are
- Be among and identify with those in need
- Be a bright beacon for those who search

In our evangelization efforts, I would, as bishop, seek to:

- Facilitate (with others) development of a comprehensive diocesan strategy for evangelization which addresses:
 - o Equipping of ministers
 - o Raising lay leadership
 - o Stewardship
 - o Reaching out to the unchurched
 - o Welcoming and integration strategies
 - o Service and outreach opportunities
 - o “Marketing” — getting out our message
- Strengthen and expand Episcopal Community Services — in services, and across our Diocese
- Continue and further develop new ministries in the diocese
- Encourage efforts to bring the Gospel to where people are, not just where we would like them to be. When the Gospel reaches people where they are, their response may just be the church in a new place!
- Provide diocesan support for evangelism and stewardship efforts in congregations
- Promote congregation and ministry evangelization plans that are coordinated with a comprehensive diocesan plan
- Facilitate education and sharing of best practices and expertise in evangelization and growth — from near and far
- Support programs in congregations for welcoming newcomers—inquiry, education and integration
- Promote excellent worship and education in congregations
- Partner with others in ministry — I have longstanding relationships with many local bishops and pastors of other denominations in south Louisiana

Fr. George Wade, Chaplain to the House of Deputies for General Convention, recently remarked that “Evangelism is not just that you need to hear my story; it is also that I need to tell my story.”³

We are telling some of our ‘story’ here in Louisiana — and well — through our ministry. Our Diocese has become a beacon of hope in our Church. Recently, people spoke glowingly at General Convention about the good work occurring in Louisiana.

We, as the Episcopal Church in Louisiana, have much more of our story to tell in so many ways. We need to tell it. After all, God didn't call us into His vineyard to eat grapes!

³ Rev. George Wade — from a reflection given in the House of Deputies, 76th General Convention of The Episcopal Church, Anaheim California, July 2009.

What do you do to have fun?

The greatest love in my life is my family — my wonderful wife of 16 years and my daughters, ages 15 and 13. Being husband and father to my family bring me great joy and comfort. Their love and support for me provide a wellspring for my ministry in the Church. My family's health and stability are very important to me, which in turn keeps me healthier and more grounded. It is vital to me to be present to my family and to set boundaries in my ministry and work so that I can also minister to them.

As for my other joys and means of fun, they are:

- **Spending time with friends and extended family**
- **Watching movies and documentaries**
- **Listening to music** — especially Rock, Jazz and Classical
- **Reading** — especially the genres of spirituality, history, biography, mystery and science fiction
- **Watching sports** — I am a rather *passionate* LSU fan. I am a long-time LSU football season ticket holder and enjoy attending and taking my daughters to games in *Death Valley*. I am also a life-long and *die-hard* New Orleans Saints fan!
- **Travelling** — especially to places of historical interest

Those who know and work with me understand that I work hard, move at a quick pace and love to be challenged. But I also take time to relax and unwind and I try to do that regularly. I hold days off and vacation time as 'sacred' when possible.

I believe that I have a good and healthy sense of humor. I enjoy laughter and a spirit of playfulness. I enjoy stories and storytelling. This is often practiced in my sermons and teaching.

Some would speculate that being a bishop is no "fun" at all—especially these days. I don't think that has to be the case. I believe that God equips those whom He calls and sustains them. One can often find fulfillment and joy in simply doing the work that God has given one to do — even as a bishop! Do I "want" to be a bishop? I assure you, "want" is not what brings me to this point. I am quite comfortable and enjoy being a parish rector, as I am at present. I am, however, attempting to be faithful to a small, persistent voice that has been with me for some time now. Louisiana has been and is my physical and spiritual home. My desire is to serve God and His people here, in the best way I can. I am discerning, and asking others to discern with me, if the call of that voice intersects with our common need for episcopal leadership.

No matter what may come, however, I trust in God's will for me and *that* will bring me joy.



Ken, Adelaide, Elise and Julie

Fact:

While trekking through the marsh once as a youngster, Ken was chased up a tree by an alligator.