



The Very Rev'd Morris K. Thompson
Dean, Christ Church Cathedral in Lexington, Kentucky

Family: Married to Rebecca; 2 children, Virginia (23) and Trey (22)

Hometown: Born in Cleveland, Mississippi

Seminary: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, University of the South and Lexington Theological Seminary

Pre-Collar Career: 2 years in the Marine Corps

Tenure as a priest: 18 years

Favorite Movie: *Shawshank Redemption*

Most Recently Read: *The Confessions of St. Augustine* and *That Distant Land* by Wendell Berry

Nominated by: The Rev'd Peter Gray (St. Anna's/Grace, New Orleans); Linda Nelson (Christ Church Cathedral, New Orleans); Deacon Michael Hackett (St. Augustine's, Metairie); and the Rev'd Henry Hudson (Trinity, New Orleans)

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

Over the past sixty years the Diocese of Louisiana has experienced much joy, yet much turmoil. Alongside your rich tradition of establishing well-respected Episcopal schools, Solomon Episcopal Conference Center, St. James Place, and Christwood Retirement Community has been the southern civil rights movement, the traumatic death of a beloved bishop, the splitting of the diocese, and natural forces of nature that not only destroyed the homes and lives of the community but also deeply wounded your bishop. In the life of a body, the latter are significant with long-lasting scars.

These events speak to the pastoral side of my ministry. Walking with and holding the tension between hopelessness and hopefulness is how I know leadership. The re-building of the body involves a time of discernment and healing while remembering the story of God's redemption. Reclaiming your tradition of being alive and finding ways to redeem those feelings rings deep within me. The possibilities are what drew me to this process. The possibility of doing something new and wonderful, of healing, and remembering we are God's people is exciting to me.

I am drawn to your diocese because of your need for a pastor, someone who has proven administrative skills, understands the importance of daily prayer life, and has a passion for building strong relationships among colleagues. My administrative skills are strong, as a result of the type and variety of my previous experiences: service in the United States Marine Corps, Director of Pastoral Services, King's Daughters' Medical Center; Vice President of Missions, Bellefonte Hospital, and Dean, Christ Church Cathedral.

A major role of the bishop is to care for the clergy. Throughout my ministry, the relationships I've had with other clergy have been significant. I've had the opportunity to support other ministers in developing their spiritual formation and seen the importance of our relationships with one another. The commonalities we share are amazing and when our resources are pooled, the results momentous.

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 always changing. By this I mean God continually speaks to me in new life-giving ways. My daily discipline begins early in the morning with silence, followed by reading, praying, and journaling.

Once a month I travel to a convent of Episcopal Sisters, The Sisters of Transfiguration in Glendale, Ohio to spend the night. It is for me a brief respite from hectic daily work. It is in this silent space that I desire to simply "be". While away I also see my spiritual director. These 24 hours of intentional discipline are tremendously important to me. This time away centers me and gives me strength to do my work. Without this time I find that I lose my true center.

Once a year I experience a longer retreat of silence. In this week of prayer, rest, scripture, and long walks, my mind is free to wonder until it finds its home in solitude. Like the brief monthly retreat, this longer period is important to me and to the congregation I serve. In this place of solace I am reunited with my longing to know the Christ who redeems. It is not uncommon upon my return to hear comments that I seem different. Through the awareness I sense from other people that I am somehow changed or renewed, I find a sense of curiosity and gift to the broader community. They want to know of my experience and what I learned. Sharing my experiences stirs in others their desire to enter into silence and to listen to their hearts desire to know

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the Christ within. Our common experiences bind us in ways unforeseen. For me it is a joy to see the lives of seekers discovering a deeper knowing of God.

In all of my spiritual disciplines I measure my learning by one question, do I love more? If my spiritual practice becomes a goal in itself, that is, if checking prayer off my daily list of “to do’s” is a goal, then I’m not loving more, just practicing a discipline. God calls us into relationships of joy, not duty. When I was growing up my maternal grandfather’s love for me was so tangible that I could feel his desire for me to be around him. He looked forward to my arrival and enjoyed my going to work or church with him, tagging along as if his life wasn’t complete without me. This degree of affection is how I understand God’s desire to know the world and me. I continue to discover this love through my life of prayer, silence, and the love of others.

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

I would acknowledge the long and abundant life this diocese has traveled, recalling some of the stories of the generosity of the communicants from the numerous parishes and missions that created the joys of the parish, diocesan, and community life. My dream would be to recover some of that enthusiasm and the love that brought people into the church. I would acknowledge the presence of each other and the important roll each one of us plays in the success of this ministry.

I would speak of our past struggles as possibilities rather than obstacles of which to be afraid. In spite of her struggles this community is still here discerning ways to live out the great commission. While the some of the history may be painful it is what it is and we cannot, nor do we wish to ignore or hide it. We are formed by our history and it has much to teach us. My dream would be that we acknowledge who we are, broken and sinful people, each and every one of us. The profile speaks of the people having resources to give, but not knowing how to make it happen. Our greatest resources are ourselves. What a wonderful dilemma. When we see abundance rather than scarcity the opportunities unfold in new and unimaginable ways. This awareness is the way the Holy Spirit moves within the faithful, always leading us towards life, not death. To live out of hope rather than fear is God’s call to us. Hope leads to life while fear leads to death.

The last point would be to call the entirety of the diocese to have the desire to be converted every day, to wake up with the knowing that today we begin again. Imagine a circle and within that circle is a center. The center is God and from that center comes light and life, our light and life. Yet when we become preoccupied and distracted the center is moved aside and our distraction becomes the center of our life. My dream is that all our desires keep Christ in the center of our lives, to be born again, and again. We wake up with the joys of meeting our Savior the Christ as we go to work, to school, to the nursing home, to visit the aging, and to listen to those whose suffering has lasted way to long. My desire for this diocese is for us to love more deeply.

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

Fear, Purpose, and Leadership are the three most important issues of the Episcopal Church today.

Fear because it has immobilized the body of believers from accepting God’s grace to be fully alive. We speak of grace all the time, of its joys, its gifts and yet it is one of the most illusive and misrepresented aspects of our faith. Life is a gift we say yet we are so afraid of making a mistake that we paralyze ourselves into non-action. We would rather hold on to old ways because they are familiar and bring back fond memories. But the memories are just that, ours, and not the memories of others. Jesus calls us to follow. It is our hope, our faith that will allow us to do so knowing that the God who raised Jesus into new life will also raise us.

Purpose because we have forgotten who we are as people of faith. The model Jesus gave us can be found in the Gospel of John chapter 13. Jesus was gathered with the disciples, and before they ate he began to wash their feet. In vs. 34 he says to the disciples, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jesus gives the command to love one another just as he has loved them. This directive will test the disciples because Judas has just gone out to betray Jesus. Now Jesus calls them to love. Our purpose is to have love for one another just as Jesus loved. He then drives his point home. The world will know if they are followers of Jesus if they love like he loved. The question to ask ourselves is, “will the world know that we are followers of Jesus by our love?” Can we live love or will we just speak it?

The third important issue facing the Episcopal Church is leadership. We have fallen into the societal trap of measuring leadership in terms of numbers such as bigger budgets, larger congregations, new construction and parochial reports that tell the world our success. To the world these reports may be the great achievements but to God they mean very little. A leader in the realm of God is someone who can hold the tension between fear and hope until the eyes of the blind can see. This charge is not easy and yet God always gives us what we need. A leader understands the need to stay in the presence of God in order to listen and receive the strength to hold these tensions. The vision is born of God and raised from the life of the people. The leader knows how to confirm sound leaders. I believe the Episcopal Church needs leaders who are not prone to anxiety and are willing to listen to the still small voice of God.

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

In William C. Martin's book *The Art of Pastoring* he writes, "The congregation does not need great visions or dreams. Of much more value is the pastor who calls attention to the gentle breeze caressing the flowers by the front door; who calms the troubled waters of grief and fear; who speaks a word that heals. You are not called to bring inspiration to people. Rather loosen the tightness in their chest that restricts their breathing, and their lungs will gratefully expand of their own accord and they will inspire themselves."

So much is already going on in the Diocese of Louisiana and yet there seems to be a need to do more as if there is some kind of magic program. Read scripture, learn how to pray and pay attention to the hurts and sorrows of our neighbor and we will be amazed at the stirring of the Holy Spirit.

What do you do to have fun?

Everything! I love my family, my work and my play. Any time I can be active with family it gives me great joy. I enjoy playing golf, fly-fishing and spending time in the woods as well as working out. Since our children are almost out of the house Rebecca and I have wonderful times looking through antique stores, cooking, working in the yard and taking a good walk. A book by Wendell Berry is always welcomed as well as just being quiet and letting my mind wonder. It really doesn't take much for me to have fun.



Morris, Rebecca, Virginia and Trey

Fact:

Morris unknowingly spent time with a bank robber immediately following his criminal act – and only became aware of who he was when he saw the nightly news.