

Bonnie Perry: Autobiographical Statement

I feel called to be your bishop because I am a pastor, reconciler and creator of communities. I am an experienced leader and a passionate evangelist, and I believe that each of these ministries is key to our ability to create a meaningful, dynamic and compassionate diocese.

I have served as the vicar and rector of All Saints Chicago for almost 17 years. Initially, I was charged with helping resurrect a church on the verge of closing. Today, All Saints is the tenth largest parish in our diocese, with a diverse congregation whose average age is 38. Our growth is tied directly to our focus on outreach, radical hospitality, stewardship and evangelism.

It's clear to me that my connection to these ministries began at an early age. I'm the oldest of four children. My dad is a retired lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps and my mom is a retired pediatric nurse. My dad's military responsibilities took him away from our family frequently, so I naturally fell into the role of helping care for my siblings. Dad's duty assignments also required us to move a great deal—so much so that I attended three different schools in second grade. I know viscerally what it feels like to be the newcomer and the outsider. I also experienced first-hand the healing, transformative power of welcoming, hospitable communities. Upon moving to a new location the first thing my father and I did was scout out the closest public library and the nearest Catholic Church. My parents modeled involvement and leadership in their faith community and, in turn, during high school I attended a teen Cursillo. There I had a profound experience of being loved for who I am, as I am, by Jesus Christ. My life has never been the same.

Upon graduating from college I spent a year in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, working at a hospice for terminally ill children and at an agency that helped clothe and feed people. It was then that I saw the power of living out Matthew 25. I fell in love with the liturgy of the Episcopal Church while attending Union Theological Seminary and was received in my senior year. Two years later, at the age of 28, I was ordained. The Rev. Susan Harlow, my partner now of 22 years, and I moved to Chicago in 1992.

In addition to serving and leading All Saints I am an adjunct professor at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, where I teach advanced studies in congregational leadership and congregational transformation. I have also had the honor of consulting on issues of congregational growth, evangelism, leadership, stewardship and outreach with a number of small congregations in Minnesota, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Kentucky, Massachusetts and West Virginia.

I also feel called to be your bishop because I love the geography and the people of the upper Midwest. Here there is an openness in both the people and the land that feeds my soul. I find the juxtaposition of small towns, rural communities and metro areas a compelling context in which to do ministry. I am renewed by being outdoors, be it in woods, prairie, or water, in all temperatures. In my spare time I paddle anything that floats and guide and teach sea kayaking on Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron.

Pastoring, leading, creating, praying and paddling in your diocese would be an honor and a challenge—a challenge I feel called to embrace. I am thankful for your invitation to continue in this mutual process of discernment.