

Douglas Sparks: Answers to Questions

Explain why you feel called to be a bishop, including your discernment process and what you have learned from it. What special gifts underscore your call to the Diocese of Minnesota specifically?

I believe a call to ministry comes from within a Faith Community. It is an invitation to consider and discern a call to ministry in the midst of that community. This applies to the ministry of all the Baptized and ministry as a deacon, presbyter or bishop. It's at the heart of the discernment for congregations considering Total Ministry as well. It is out of this belief and invitation that I respond. I've been encouraged by people in our diocese, lay and ordained, to offer myself to the process of discernment leading to election to serve as Bishop of our diocese. The call to serve is specific...as Bishop of Minnesota. The invitation comes from people who have worked with me and know the diocese and its opportunities and challenges. I have spent time in prayer and in conversation with others. I asked people to visit the website, review the survey and other material as a way of giving context to our conversation. In addition to my wife, Dana, and our three children, I discussed this with a number of people. In each conversation, they said they believe I have the gifts the diocese is looking for and should offer myself to see what the Church and Holy Spirit have to say. So I do, trusting in God's grace.

I have found my voice as a Servant Leader during some difficult decisions in the diocese and gained the respect of lay and other ordained leaders. I have learned humility. I have read, marked, learned and affirm the BCMS Report, its vision, our identity and purpose, its guiding principals and goals. I've learned to seek counsel and advice from others...that I work best in collaboration with others. I have learned how challenging and necessary it is to respect the dignity of every human being. I have learned others value me as a pastor, priest and teacher, and that I have gifts for preaching, teaching and presiding in worship. I've made and learned from mistakes...how to apologize and say I'm sorry. I have learned from loss and success. I have grown in my capacity to learn from others and be an effective manager of people and resources. I have learned to listen, even when it is difficult. I have taken to heart the prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi...Lord, make me an instrument of your peace...seeking first to console...to understand...and to love. I believe these gifts and lessons have prepared me for ministry as Bishop of Minnesota if called and elected to serve.

The diaconate is a major pillar of the Diocese of Minnesota. What has been your experience in supporting, encouraging, and making use of the diaconate?

I was ordained a transitional deacon on 9 April 1983 and served as a deacon in an inner city congregation in St. Louis, Missouri until I was ordained a presbyter on 2 June 1984. I came to understand the unique gift and witness deacons are to the life of the church, mostly by observing and honoring the gifts of the life-long or vocational deacons I learned from during that year. I continue to learn from and honor the unique vocation of deacons in the Episcopal Church.

Since 1990, when I was called to serve as the rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Whitewater, Wisconsin, my life and ministry and the congregation's call to service in the world

has been widened by the ministry of deacons. In the four congregations I have served in since 1990, three of them have been blessed with the ministry and presence of deacons. At St. Luke's in Whitewater, the Rev. Mary Misner was called to serve as a deacon with a particular focus as a Geriatric Nurse Practitioner. At St. Matthias in Waukesha, we were blessed with two deacons, the Rev. Richard Fox, whose ministry focused around prison and hospital visitation and the Rev. Charles Zellermyer, whose ministry was to the homebound and blind in the community. During my tenure as Rector, three people were discerned for ordained ministry; two for the priesthood and one for the diaconate. The Rev. Nancy Hodge was ordained from St. Matthias in June of 2004 with a special focus on ministry to the homeless in Waukesha County. I also served on the Commission on Ministry in Milwaukee and as part of that ministry, reviewed and revised, along with deacons and lay persons, the formation process for Deacons in Milwaukee.

Since 2005, St. Luke's has been blessed by the ministry of the Rev. Phyllis Kunz, assigned by Bishop Jelinek to serve as our deacon. Her ministry has focused on Prison visitation, assisting women with issues of re-entry back into the community after incarceration as well as educating us in the process of restorative justice.

I believe the Diaconate is essential to the spiritual transformation and ongoing renewal of the church in every congregation especially because they are the icons of servant ministry...called to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns and hopes of the world.

Presently 38 congregations have embraced Total Ministry. What experience have you had with Total Ministry parishes? What would be your ideas to support and strengthen that movement in Minnesota?

During the summers of 1996, 1997 and 1998, I took courses in Advanced Studies in Congregational Development at the Seabury Institute in Evanston, Illinois. The institute was founded by the Rev. Dr. Arlin Routhage in response to the growing need to be more intentional about forming leaders in Congregational Development for the Episcopal Church of the 21st century. By this time, the practice of Total or Mutual Ministry had various incarnations across the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion.

During the summer of 1998, the persons chosen to discuss their experiences of Total Ministry were the Rev. Michael Garrison of Nevada, the Rev. Sandi Holmberg of South Dakota and (in 2000) Minnesota and the Rev. Jim Kelsey of Northern Michigan. Their presentations and the week they spent with us in debate and discussion, remain an integral part of my theological understanding of Total Ministry...the primacy of Baptism and the blessings and challenges of a commitment as a diocese to Total Ministry.

My ministerial experience of Total Ministry is limited to the Diocese of Wellington in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Diocese of Minnesota. In Wellington, as part of the Bishop's Council of Advice, we dealt with the challenges of implementing and supporting the process of team formation in congregations committed to Mutual Ministry. In Minnesota, in Region 5, we have one Total Ministry congregation and several others in process. I have served as a Priest Mentor

for a Locally Ordained Priest and have come to appreciate the canonical and pastoral dilemmas he and the rest of the team face. From a distance, I have observed a great need for regular and ongoing contact with a Regional Missioner who is ordained and can be a consistent resource to this congregation and others exploring the possibility. In addition to discerning a local priest, discernment should include the ministry of deacon because all ministries should be encouraged, supported and visible if possible in each congregation.

Total Ministry is a gift to the church. However, it is not a quick or easy solution to the challenges of ministry development or delivery. In the Diocese of Minnesota, we are blessed with over one third of our congregations living into or in the process of discernment regarding Total Ministry. As bishop, I would strengthen this ministry with various resources and assess its efficacy in each congregation and region.

Our diocese has varied ethnic and cultural components: American Indian, African American, Hmong American, Spanish Speaking Americans, and GLBT. What has been your experience working with these groups? What is your vision to strengthen and support these ministries?

Since beginning ministry at St. Luke's – Rochester in 2004, we have enhanced and initiated intentional relationships with Episcopal Christians of varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds in the diocese. We have financially supported and participated in the Montgomery Migrant Ministry (now San Jose Obrero) from its beginning. In January 2006, we began a relationship with St. Philip's in St. Paul that has grown to include St. Thomas since their merger. In 2007, we initiated an annual Mission Trip to White Earth which includes several Work projects and a four day Vacation Bible School. In the fall of 2008, we made a commitment to support the ministry of Holy Apostles' in St. Paul. These relationships continue because of our profound sense that we are blessed as a diocese with a diversity of people and congregations, our desire to meet in mission together and to learn from one another.

It would be fair to say that prior to 2003, the people of St. Luke's, like many congregations, avoided having conversations regarding Human Sexuality especially regarding Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual and Trans-gendered persons and their place among us. Since 2003, that has changed...for all of us. The people of St. Luke's are a community of welcome which strives to respect the dignity of every human being. Over the last 18 – 24 months, we have had intentional conversations, during Adult Forum and weekly Bible Study, focused on listening to the varied experiences and perspectives of others. These initiatives included hosting two viewings and discussions of "For the Bible Tells Me So" sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign and our leadership supporting our participation in a "Faith and Fairness Forum" also sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign.

One reason I became an Episcopalian is because I admire our desire and commitment not to avoid difficult issues. Issues of ethnicity, culture and class remain a challenge for us in congregations throughout our diocese. As bishop, I would continue to support the various ethnic and cultural communities and congregations in our diocese, seeking to build bridges of understanding and support among us. I would also call us to continue becoming a community

of welcome for all people, striving to listen respectfully, to console, to understand and to love in the midst of exploring our differences.

Describe a previous conflict between several parties that you had been personally involved in and how you went about resolving it? What was the ultimate outcome?

By responding to the call to serve as Dean of Wellington, I came face to face with issues of cultural diversity which continue to divide peoples throughout the Anglican Communion and learned well that these issues remain a challenge. This clash of cultures became a conflict during my ministry at the cathedral.

The Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia is best known for A New Zealand Prayer Book (ANZPB) published in 1989. Arguably, the first authentic expression of honoring, in Common Worship, the three cultures which comprise the province: Maori, Pakeha and Pacifica. However, I found that living into this vision of identity and worship, within a congregation, is quite the challenge.

Once in New Zealand, I spent several Sundays in the congregation, experiencing their worship. ANZPB incorporates Maori greetings and I was surprised to discover no Maori was spoken in the cathedral. They also did not exchange the peace and used only one form of the Eucharistic Liturgy throughout the entire Liturgical year. I shared these observations with Bishop Tom, who said, "Douglas, that is precisely why you were called here. Whatever changes you make, you have my complete support." I shared these concerns with the Wardens and Vestry, members of Chapter and the staff, who also supported making these changes in our worship. However, not everyone in the congregation embraced them with the same enthusiasm. I received several notes with comments like, "it's a bit rich for an American here for less than 30 minutes to be making these changes" and "why don't we use Greek or Japanese during the summer months when the tourists come?" Nonetheless, I remained focused on communicating, presiding, preaching and teaching...using ANZPB itself as the most useful tool.

During my first year, clergy and lay persons from throughout the diocese commented on how pleased they were that the cathedral congregation was becoming a community whose worship reflected what was envisioned by ANZPB. Living through this process was not easy. But in the midst of the difficulty, an Archdeacon Emeritus affirmed my efforts when he said, "Mr. Dean, who would have thought it would take an American to introduce us to *our* Prayer Book. I am grateful!" Recently, Bishop Tom wrote to say, "Many of the changes you initiated [at some personal cost] have blossomed and are no longer issues.

How would you define the realities facing the Episcopal Church today, and how would you lead the diocese in responding to them?

The realities facing the Episcopal Church were defined in part for us by the Bishop's Commission on Mission Strategy Report affirmed by Diocesan Convention in October 2007. As a denomination nationally, we are facing decline just as other "mainline" denominations are in this post-modern / emerging era, as we discern how to be the church in this changing and challenging time.

In the report, Goals 1 & 2 focused on Spiritual Transformation and connecting or reconnecting congregations in their context. These goals remain the ongoing focus of our work in joining God's mission of reconciliation and restoration in the world. Goals 3 & 4 focused on

reconfiguring the Diocese as a network and the effective stewardship of our resources. These two goals are conjoined in our work in discerning how to transform the institution and its structures in such a way that helps us become more adaptive and responsive to the changing realities around us. Others voices, like Brian McLaren and Phyllis Tickle, have echoed the very concerns we have come to face in the Diocese of Minnesota. We come to this endeavor with unique advantages such as a mindset focused on the middle way, making use of our Anglican heritage which honors our reformed and catholic heritage. We also come with specific disadvantages. Sometimes we are guilty of a kind of arrogance or elitism. Sometimes we have over focused on the need to save the institution rather than responding to human need more quickly and creatively. We have also tended to focus on internal issues which have divided us and depleted and diminished our energy and resources for mission and ministry for the sake of others.

The coming years in our diocese will be difficult. In light of diminishing resources and growing needs, my ministry as bishop would be in some cases that of a hospice chaplain, attending to the grief of those who are experiencing the loss of a church they once loved. In other circumstances, my ministry would be one of a midwife, attending to the new birth of patterns and ways of being and emerging as the Episcopal Church in the 21st century. In every aspect, I believe the life of the diocese and its ministry must become lighter, more adaptive and flexible...more portable and inclusive to those who come seeking a relationship with God manifest in the Risen Christ and given a unique expression in the Episcopal Church.