

Doyle Turner: 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 have not sought to be a bishop. I believe that the call to be a bishop is a call from God. The dilemma of my discernment is that of separating the voice of the Holy Spirit from the workings of my own thoughts and ambitions.

One of my spiritual commitments has always been openness to God's call. My cultural background restrains me from putting myself forward and leads me to wait until my inward sense is ratified by someone else. A leader in one of the congregations I serve asked me to consider allowing my name to be submitted as an Open Nominee in the bishop election process and I consented.

My personal discernment began with earnest prayers for guidance and for strength. Then I consulted with my wife, Mary, and the circle of our family -- as is always our custom whenever there is challenge or opportunity. With their encouragement and support, I turned to the ones I regard as my spiritual counselors. With their approval, and with a positive response from a widening group of those whom I regard as key advisors, I decided to begin the formal process and let the Spirit work.

What are the gifts that underscore my sense of vocation?

I am first and foremost a pastor. My greatest gift is my pastoral relationship with people of many kinds and human conditions. My most satisfying experiences as a priest have been those times of connection and resonance when, either at a hospital bedside, over a cup of coffee, or out in a boat fishing, I have been able to converse in deeply-felt terms about the ways God moves in our lives.

I "dream dreams and see visions," as Joel the prophet says. I look beyond the circumstances of the present to the vast possibilities for mission across this large area and highly-diverse population. The vision and the mission are primarily spiritual concerns. The demands are practical, but meeting them calls first upon our spiritual resources -- prayer, the good heart, and the courage of our faith; and with God's help, a life-transforming Gospel will be brought to all the people of Minnesota. But let it be said again that without that essential spirit-centeredness, no "mission strategy" can succeed.

I am a listener. I listen, first, to the words of the Gospel, where the spirit of Jesus Christ is most clearly heard and understood. I keep a regular discipline of study and prayer. I listen as I celebrate the Sacraments. I also listen to people. I believe that in managing the affairs of the diocese the bishop will need to have open ears and a perceptive mind to weigh the views of those who will be affected by his or her decisions. Procedural consultation is the strength of our canonical structure. It is also essential that a bishop be alert to the voices of all the congregations, whether they be large or small, rich or poor, near at hand, metropolitan or rural.

I have a sense of the rich history of the Diocese of Minnesota. My priesthood is rooted in the

mission tradition with which the diocese was founded. The diocese has grown, changed, and become more complex, but its spirit remains that of its missionary founders. We remain close to our missionary forebears in their understanding that the Church of Jesus Christ is forever a missionary enterprise, whether in the frontier wilderness or the equally-challenging frontiers of a great metropolitan landscape.

I have the emotional toughness and spiritual energy to lead.

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 have always understood that the diaconate is the verb, the visible action of Christianity in community. It is the caring, tending, advocating work of the diaconate that has historically been and continues to be where the church meets the world. We are blessed to have an extraordinarily engaged diaconal ministry in this diocese.

I have just recently returned from the Diocese of Wyoming where I lead a two-day spiritual workshop for the members of the diaconate there. There were ten deacons, both women and men of varied ages. There was a Native American woman present with us who was deacon on her home reservation. We had a great time exploring, encouraging and building their spiritual self images as deacons. It would be wonderful to meet and get to know the deacons of this diocese in a similar manner.

I serve as a supply priest at Trinity Church Park Rapids as well as mentor to their bishop's committee and session, and worship committee. We are very blessed to have a "summering" transitional deacon from another diocese that has extensive experience as a parish nurse. She has permission from our bishop and hers to do her work while she is here. I serve as her mentor, coach and friend. She serves in every capacity as a deacon. She serves at the altar, reads the gospel, visits those who are shut in and the sick and visits the lonely. She is out in the community on a regular basis. It is a joy to work with her.

It is a rare blessing in rural Region I and I suspect in the other rural regions to be able to have the presence and ministry of deacons. I have often wondered whether, if deacons were allowed to serve in the congregation that discerned and raised them into the diaconate, this would translate into there being more deacons in rural areas. We sorely need that loving verb in our rural vocabulary.

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

In or about 1978, I was a Lay Reader in one of the churches in Region I of the diocese. At that time a number of the churches in our region began studying about, and preparing to adopt, the

concept of Total Ministry. A number of us traveled to Tempe, Arizona, for a conference with Bishop Wesley Frensdorf, who was one of the pioneers in the Total Ministry movement.

From 1997 to 2000, I served as the Executive Director of the Indigenous Theological Training Institute in Minneapolis. Our focus was to encourage, raise up and train local leadership teams in small churches and missions across the United States. We saw this as a viable strategy in continuing to make a vital and transformational gospel ministry available in communities where churches would otherwise be closed.

Theologically, Total Ministry is modeled on the work of Jesus himself as he called disciples who would lead the church, teaching them and preparing them to lead his Church and in turn call and train others. Those would then prepare still others in an ever-widening spread of the Gospel. Ideally, total ministry in a general sense is the aim of every congregation as its members minister to one another.

For many congregations, the decision to opt for total ministry is prompted by financial necessity. That is a proper and necessary reason. Congregations have, though, discovered in the process that total ministry has had the surprising effect of revitalizing the church. That affirmative reason ought to be nurtured.

Initial training and installation of total ministry teams is obviously important. It is easy to think that the goal is simply to form the total ministry team. What is less obvious is the fact that those teams will change over time and will need from the outset to plan for their own replacements. The bishop will need to ensure that total ministry teams are not simply launched and left on their own, but are constantly in the process of discernment and are kept in contact with diocesan sources of encouragement and support.

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

I am a person of Native American culture. Our community has had a unique connection to the diocese as its historical mission from the time of Bishop Whipple. We have always been in close relationship with the members of the African-American community who have identified and shared friendships with us.

I was part of a group who worked at United Theological Seminary in St. Paul to get an educational component started for locally discerned Native Americans. We were enriched to have a Spanish speaking man from his community about the time a mission for Spanish speaking people was being formed. He identified with us and became part of our group and, because we welcomed him in and listened, we learned from each other.

I worked for a time with a national training institute which focused on providing training and funding for Native American ministry students. I traveled extensively and worked closely with these students from all across the country.

I have also worked along side and have respect for friends who are gay and lesbian. Each culture I have had the privilege to encounter has enriched and expanded my knowledge and understanding of cultures other than my own.

As a diocese we are enriched and blessed to have this wide diversity of people. Each brings gifts to share with the church. To strengthen each of the components we have to make sure that each has a voice that is heard. We must be open and accepting of the gifts that are offered. We need to work on closing the power gap that exists. We need to be honest about and work to equalize the inequities. We need to be better at refraining from labeling and stereotyping.

Dr. King said in one of his famous speeches, "I have a dream that one day my children and their children will be judged by the content of their character, rather than the color of their skin." This needs to be our mantra as we walk into the future together.

Culture should not be an end in itself, neither should culture become an obstacle to the mission we have as Christians. Culture must be open to the transforming influence of the gospel. My vision to strengthen these ministries is to be open to, be present with, listen to and understand the various cultures. We need to respect the spirituality of each culture. We need to recognize the blessing of having these cultures as vital partners in mission.

My guide to this approach is St. Paul as he relates differences as needed parts of the total body. He implores us not to see one part as more important or more powerful than the others. We need a spiritual wholeness in the body of the church as we do the work God has given us to do.

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

I was invited to be one of two people who were to go into a remote Alaskan village above the Arctic Circle to help bring peace to a village in conflict. There were several factions consisting of family groups who were in conflict and the whole village was upset. Due to the remote location there was no possibility of separation to let the conflict settle.

The main meeting place for this village is the Episcopal Church and the local priest's home next door. We held a church service on Monday morning upon our arrival and there announced that we would be in the church all day to listen to and counsel and pray with the people. We set up two listening stations, one at either end of the church. We sat and listened as people came to the church to pour out their grief and frustration. We responded with suggestions for resolution and then prayed with the people.

Evenings after dinner, we met in the priest's home to sing and listen to the history of the people and the village. There were also stories of faith told by the people of the village. This cycle was repeated on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Thursday night at the last gathering a representative of the people asked us to stay one more day. They were very happy that the village was beginning to return to normal and they had called the neighboring villages to come together for a ceremony of celebration Friday night. They called this a revival. We already had our tickets booked all the way home and told them we couldn't stay. The village nurse called the airlines and got the cost of changing our tickets. The people took up a collection to cover the cost and we stayed an extra day to celebrate with them.

The resolution came by patient listening, counseling, gathering people to remind them of their commonality of faith and many, many prayers. It was a week of emotional healing, psychological healing, and physical healing. It was beautiful time I will always remember.

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

The first reality I see is that we are a church which has beautiful and gracious liturgy. We have wondrous churches and magnificent music. Episcopalians are a people who appreciate these glorious realities. These are not only a source of spiritual satisfaction to Episcopalians; they are valuable instruments for outreach and evangelism.

There are, however, other realities which are taking our focus and our spiritual energy away from our principle reason for being a church. These realities scatter and divide us into seemingly irreconcilable positions at a time when we need every speck of our spiritual energy to answer our historic call to mission. Our historic call to mission is to make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28: 18b) Disciples are those who follow Christ reconciled to God and one another.

This ancient holy obligation of mission, discipleship and reconciliation has been passed to our generation. The question we have to decide upon is how will we respond to the responsibility that has been given to us? Do we let the realities separate and divide us forever or do we turn them into opportunities to vigorously and joyfully pursue our common mission.

What do we want history to say about us? What do we want to happen to the church on our watch? "...but those who received him, who believed in his name he gave power to become children of God. **John 1: 12 RSV.**" We have the power to choose and the opportunity before us to determine what will be said about our generation and how well we discharged our stewardship of this arm of the Church of God.

The question is this: how would I lead the diocese in responding to the realities? As your bishop I would call the diocese to focus on our common mission rather than our differing opinions. The contentious issues in the church are realities, but they are issues of our particular moment in time. Our call to mission is an eternal calling. We can discuss issues and find common ground without letting them become divisive. We can deal with them in open discussion, with careful listening, with prayer, loving reconciliation and common worship. We can deal with our issues constructively and then go on to affirm our common mission. I would have responsibility to design the setting and process for the discussions.

There are other realities that affect different groups within the church. They concern a number of congregations or relate to specially defined ministries, but they deserve the care and attention of all. These are mainly the concerns for urban minorities, the rural and urban poor and to the victims of substance abuse, as well as those who suffer discrimination resulting from their race or sexual orientation.

I truly believe that following a powerful vision of a healthy, spiritual and lively church, with a focus on our common mission, and if the souls of our congregations are fed, we will be able to heal divisive realities and accomplish whatever we can vision together.