

The Rev'd Canon Dr. Neal O. Michell

1) Questions

a. Describe your faith story, including your call to the ministry.

I was born in Dallas, Texas, and grew up in Garland. For the first six years my family was unchurched. My father died when I was six, and my mother looked for strength and encouragement and found it in a new Episcopal church that had started in a doctor's office about a mile from our house. We attended church and Sunday School but drifted away after several years.

At age eleven I gave my life to Christ in a neighborhood Bible club and began attending church with the family that led the Bible Club. In college, I was involved in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Also during college I began reading books by Thomas Howard, John Stott, J.I. Packer, and C.S. Lewis. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my spiritual mentors were all four Anglicans. I had not at this time connected these Anglican influences with the Episcopal church of my childhood.

I began searching for a church that would meet my spiritual and intellectual needs. I found this in the church of my childhood and was confirmed at St. David's in Austin.

Following college I attended law school in Houston. There I attended Church of the Redeemer and met my wife, Varita. Redeemer had profound, soul stirring worship and was heavily involved in inner city ministry. At Redeemer I caught a vision of strong lay ministry and worship that touches people's soul in a deep way. Our first child, Natalie, was born in Houston.

After several years we moved to Del Rio, Texas, where I joined a law firm. During this time I sensed a call to ordained ministry. Although I thought that I had escaped this call which I had considered in college and dismissed, the "Hound of Heaven" caught up with me. I responded, was approved by Diocese of West Texas and went off to Sewanee where I was introduced to the more catholic side of the Church than I had experienced in West Texas. My spiritual life and reflective life deepened greatly while at Sewanee.

We returned to Texas with a second child born and served two congregations: Holy Trinity in Carrizo Springs and St. Timothy's in Cotulla. I was immediately responsible for two congregations, preaching weekly, leading Bible studies, two vestries, and learning to minister in small towns. This experience was invaluable. Holy Trinity grew under my leadership but declined after I left. I learned that as priest, I needed to form leaders, not just gather a crowd. Our daughter, Anna, was born at this time.

Next, we served St. Barnabas, Fredericksburg, Texas. Here I learned that congregations have histories and that I was simply a steward for that congregation. I began to understand congregational dynamics. This church also experienced growth under my leadership, but this time it was a much healthier growth—not centered so much in my personality as it was in building a congregation where lay leaders grew in prominence and responsibility. Whereas, at Holy Trinity, being a priest was about me and my abilities; at St. Barnabas, it was much more about those I served and my serving them and developing leaders and letting leaders be leaders. In Fredericksburg God gave us our fourth child, Andrew.

Following our time in Fredericksburg we moved to Memphis where we had the opportunity to plant a church. My interest in congregational development grew as I discovered the dynamics of the church changing as it grew. I discovered an ability to articulate the things I was learning in a way that others found helpful.

Following Memphis we returned to Texas where in New Braunfels I put into practice more that I had been learning. Again the congregation grew; again it was healthy growth that was sustained after I left.

Finally I was called to serve the Diocese of Dallas as Canon Missioner for Strategic Development. I truly found a diocesan home where my gifts and passions were given freedom. I can honestly say that I have grown much here, served much here, and contributed to the growth and health of the diocese.

b. Describe your management style, including some things you would do in resolving conflict. For example, between a rector and his/her vestry.

My management style is based on the biblical model of a community of disciples. That is the model that Jesus used to form disciples. He formed them as a community before he sent them out to do ministry.

Corollaries to this “community of disciples” model are the values of being a learning community, visional, historically aware, accountable, and celebration.

Being a community of disciples means that we are first formed as a community before we do business (that is the thesis for my book, *Beyond Business as Usual*). As the group learns to share their individual faith stories and to pray for each other, the business of the group is transformed into holy work, because work done in the context of sharing and prayer changes the members from being people of opinions and votes (winners and losers) to a group heading in the same direction. Also, learning together is crucial. The group that learns together will grow together. Where information is share, all members feel empowered.

Vision is vital. Proverbs tells us “where there is no vision the people perish.” Vision motivates people to stretch beyond themselves and to sacrifice. A compelling vision gives to those who have bought into the vision an identity that the individual work is part of a greater whole. It can transform what otherwise seems like busy work into holy work, so that the one who sweeps a room sweeps it unto the Lord.

Vision must be historically aware. That is, when a diocese elects a bishop, the bishop does not “bring a vision with him or her,” rather, the bishop discerns the diocesan vision that was implanted by God on the corporate soul of those that planted the diocese. (The same is true, I believe, of individual congregations as well.) Change that is tied to the vision of the diocese and will more readily be accepted. Change not rooted in the vision becomes simply one person’s idea and is up for majority vote. (Read Chapter 5 in *How to Hit the Ground Running*.)

All are held accountable, for attendance, for prayer, for healthy relationships and active involvement. Without accountability, those who are actively involved will eventually lose interest; and those who are not fully involved will end up simply “voicing their opinions” in the group rather than working collaboratively together.

Finally, the group needs to celebrate: to learn to play together, joke together, and celebrate wins and accomplishments.

As Canon to the Ordinary, I work with congregations in conflict on a regular basis. Here is the process I generally use:

I listen, I listen, then I share what I have heard with the major parties, I try to determine whether the antagonists are truly leaders in the congregation or simply what I would call “loud voices” . Then, I make an initial assertion regarding where the group is, I determine whether the level of conflict is at a lower level or higher level, and then I propose a solution. Where the conflict is at a high level I encourage both sides to propose a plan for the rector to depart in a gracious and healthy way. I encourage the priest to leave well so that his or her leaving does not become a separate issue from the initial conflict. For the congregation that means working through a departure process with the priest in such a healthy way that they don’t get a reputation as a “clergy killer.”

c. If you were elected bishop of EDUSC how would you counsel a rector who was asked to bless a same gender relationship in his/her parish, and how would you lead us beyond our divisions.

First, I would counsel the priest that the Church does not authorize the blessing of same sex unions. We are part of a larger family, not just of The Episcopal Church but of the Anglican Communion and a part of the larger Church catholic. As an Episcopal diocese we are committed to the apostolic faith and to apostolic order. Our commitment to apostolic faith means that we are not really free on our own to do such things as the blessing of same sex unions. Those are not the norms of the Anglican Communion, nor are they permitted among the churches of our ecumenical partners, namely the Roman Catholic churches and the Orthodox churches. Our commitment to apostolic order requires that we not move forward on such things without the theological and the biblical exegetical work done by us in cooperation with our ecumenical partners. That is what the General Convention in 1992 committed to, and we are not free to innovate in such areas on our own.

Second I would counsel the priest to find a way to pray for this couple and in such a way that they feel loved by the priest and the surrounding community. This may take a lot of time and pastoral care. Just because the church cannot bless the union doesn't mean that the priest cannot provide pastoral care for these two individuals.

Third, I would ask this priest not to make this a public issue for the sake of the diocese. I would say that we as a diocese have so many more missional concerns that an issue such as this would sidetrack the diocese and create unhealthy division in the diocese. We need time as a diocese to get focused on mission. So, for the sake of the body of Christ in this place I am asking this priest not to make this an issue which will divide the congregation and the diocese.

Fourth, I would lead us forward by focusing us on the vision of the diocese. I would hold a series of clergy days where clergy begin sharing their faith stories, how they came to faith in Christ, how they felt called to ordained ministry, what were their hopes and dreams at the beginning of their ordained ministry, what their hopes and dreams are now, what are the resurrection stories in their lives, and pray for each other. *Then*, I would call these same groups to study the Anglican Covenant, and *then*, I would have these same groups begin to study the whole sexuality issue: first by bringing in theologians to inform us and to lead us in conversation. I would then encourage the clergy to repeat this process in their own churches.

I am fond of saying, "You can shoot a deer, but you can't shoot Bambi." This is based on the fact that when the movie "Bambi" was released, the hunting industry in the US was cut in half in the year following. The reason? Because kids wouldn't let their fathers shoot deer, because the deer their fathers were shooting were all "Bambi." The unity of the diocese is rooted in the clergy loving each other as individuals, to see each other as "Bambi" rather than just another deer to shoot.

d. If I were the bishop of EDUSC, some of the first steps I would take to get started are . . .

Max DePree in *Leadership is an Art* says that the first task of the leader is to define reality. So, the first thing I would do, before the consecration, is to learn in a greater depth, the history and values of the diocese. During this time I would need to listen to a lot of people in order to have a sense of where the diocese is currently. (DePree also says that the last task of the leader is to say, “thank you.”) I would listen to the stories, particularly of long-term leaders, in order to see the hand of God at work in the history of the diocese.

I would spend a lot of time visiting and listening: I would meet with the leadership of each diocesan institution; in addition I would meet with the people in each diocesan institution to hear how the ministry of the diocese is actually lived out in their lives and to what extent the vision of the diocese is being lived out.

I would meet with the clergy in groups of eight to ten, to get to know them individually, what their hopes and dreams are, what they need for the diocese to do for them, what gifts they have that they can offer the diocese, and what changes they would make if they were bishop. I would ask them the names of key lay leaders in the diocese that I should meet with in the first year. Then I would meet with the most common names that were given me.

Also, I would have a couple of events with the clergy spouses and encourage my wife to get to know them and know what their needs are and to begin the process with them of forming them as a community of disciples.

Then I would visit the college ministries to get to know our college chaplains and college students. In the same vein I would visit the diocesan summer camps to get to know the children and youth of our diocese.

In addition, I would visit with the churches that were involved in the Healthy Church Initiative to determine how effective that training has been for the diocese. I would determine which churches are in a context where growth is possible and see how the diocese might help them with resources to foster their growth. A diocese is only as strong and healthy as its churches. The diocese as an entity exists to resource its churches.

Overall I would want to determine whether the diocese is functioning as a pastoral or a program-sized diocese. I would, of course, be new to the diocese, and I would want to see whether we are being efficient and strategic in the use of our resources or underfunctioning as a diocese. I would want to look into our communications strategy as a diocese. Do our church leaders feel communicated with?

Finally, I would want to meet with the governor of South Carolina and whatever other major elected officials that people in the diocese have relationships with.

THE REV. CANON DR. NEAL O. MICHELL

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FAMILY INFORMATION

Wife, Varita Gail Bean Michell, Married since August 5, 1978. Varita is a formerly licensed Physical Therapist, BS *cum laud*, Texas, Women's University, 1977

Children: Natalie (27); John (24), Anna (22) Andrew (19)

EDUCATION

Garland High School	1971
University of Texas, Austin, TX Bachelor of Arts <i>cum laud</i>	1976
University of Houston Law Center, Houston, TX Juris Doctor	1979
School of Theology, University of the South, Sewanee, TN Master of Divinity	1986
Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA Doctor of Ministry	2003

ORDINATION

Deacon, June 13, 1986, Diocese of West Texas, The Rt. Rev. Stanley Hauser

Priest, December 13, 1986, Diocese of West Texas, The Rt. Rev. John H. MacNaughton

EXPERIENCE

Canon to the Ordinary

July 2008-Present

Episcopal Diocese of Dallas
1630 N. Garrett Ave., Dallas, TX 75206

Projects:

- Developed Rectors and Vicars Leadership Training Course

Canon Missioner for Strategic Development

February 2001-July 2008

Oversaw the implementation of the Strategic Plan for the Diocese of Dallas

Interim Rector, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Sept 2007-June 2008

Interim Rector, St. Nicholas Episcopal Church, November 2006-August 2007

These two churches had rectors who left their congregations and The Episcopal Church over the consecration of the Bishop of New Hampshire. Each left the church having fostered division and having left their churches in emotional and spiritual disarray. I was brought in to bring the congregations back to health in order for them to be in a place where they could call a rector.

Projects:

- Guided the process of diocesan structures to embrace the diocesan strategic plan
- Developed Church Planting Commission, World Mission Commission, Rural Church Initiative, Titus Project for recruiting and forming prospective clergy for ministry in rural churches

- Helped shift focus of Annual Diocesan Convention from “primarily business” to “mission-focused” orientation with workshops, strategic plan video highlighting missional activities of the diocese
- Introduced “best practices” presentation to monthly Executive Council
- Assisted planning and execution of diocesan \$7 million Capital Campaign

Since 2000, Diocese of Dallas has:

- Grown 10% in average Sunday attendance
- Grown 2.5% in the number of Pledging Units
- Grown 30% in the operating income of our churches

Rector, St. John’s Episcopal Church

April 1998-January 2001

312 S. Guenther St., New Braunfels, TX, · 78130

Led turnaround of congregation in decline, transitioned from Transitional to Program size

Highlights:

- Average Sunday Attendance grew from 202 to 275
- Increased missions and outreach involvement
- Partnered with 2 churches in diocese to help plant church in Danli, Honduras
- Purchased nine acres of land for relocation to accommodate growth

Rector, Church of the Redeemer, Episcopal

January 1992-March 1998

3100 Houston Levee Rd. · Germantown, TN · 38139

Planted church, attained parish status within first nine months

Highlights:

- Built 10,000 sq. ft. worship, education, office facility
- Church grew to 200+ Average Sunday Attendance

Rector, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church

November 1988-Dec 1992

601 West Creek St. · Fredericksburg, TX · 78624

Guided Church from Pastoral size to Transitional size and embrace growth

Highlights:

- Average Sunday Attendance grew from 115 to 155
- Annual Income increased 97%
- Added various capital improvements: stained glass windows, tracker organ, columbarium

Deacon in Charge and Rector, Holy Trinity Episcopal Church

July 1986-November 1988

1807 Pena St. · Carrizo Springs, TX · 78834

Deacon and Priest in Charge, St. Timothy’s Episcopal Church

305 Choctaw St. · P.O. Box 738 · Cotulla, TX · 78014

Led Holy Trinity in growth in face of downward economy and previous conflict in church

Highlights:

- Average Sunday Attendance grew from 17 to 55
- Developed Parish Food Pantry and Community Outreach Ministry

- Refurbished altar area, Parish Hall, various capital improvements

Seminarian, University of the South, Sewanee, TN August 1983-May 1986

Attorney at Law, Lowery, Foster & Hodge May 1982-August 1986
Del Rio, TX

Attorney, Private Practice July 1979-April 1982
Houston, TX

Episcopal Church Leadership Involvement

Diocese of Dallas:

- Commission on Ministry
- Diocesan Examining Chaplain
- Church Planting Commission
- Constitution and Canons Committee
- Strategic Planning Committee
- Diocesan Convention Planning Committee
- Rural Church Commission
- Interim Rector
 - Church of the Intercession, Carrollton, TX
 - Cathedral Church of St. Matthew, Dallas, TX
 - St. Nicholas Episcopal Church, Flower Mound, TX
 - St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Dallas, TX

Diocese of West Tennessee

- Bishop and Council
- Standing Committee
- Congregational Development Consultant
- Cluster Coordinator
- Diocesan Coordinating Commission
- Spiritual Director, Happening
- Worship Chair for two (2) diocesan conventions

Diocese of West Texas

- Spiritual Director, Cursillo
- Spiritual Director, Y.E.S.
- Long Range Planning Committee
- Congregational Development Committee
- Dean, Western Convocation
- Dean, Northern Convocation
- Chair – Evangelism Department
- Christian Education Department
- Church Planting Commission
- Constitution and Canons Committee

Positions Held Nationally

- Province 7 Evangelism Coordinator
- General Convention Deputy, 2006, 2009

- General Convention Missions Committee, 2006, 2009
- Trustee, University of the South

Academic, Community, and Ecumenical Involvement

- Founder, Community Outreach Ministry, Carrizo Springs
- Lions Club
- Texas Department of Human Services Community Board Member, Carrizo Springs
- Hill Country Community Needs Council Board Member
- Fredericksburg Food Pantry, Founding Board Member
- Hill Country Ministerial Alliance, President
- Hill Country Youth Commission, Founding Board Member
- Memphis Area Racial Reconciliation Task Force, Founding Member
- Soccer Coach – Two (2) years
- New Braunfels Rebounds, Executive Board Member, Founding Board Member
- New Braunfels Ministerial Alliance
- Hill Country Hospice, Board Member
- International Christian Fellowship, University of Texas at Dallas
- Vickery Refugees Ministry, Dallas
- Preston-Tioga Neighborhood Association
- Covenant-Community Website Author (www.covenant-communion.net)
- Missions Involvement
 - Diocese of Northern Mexico, Summer Camp, June 1987, 1989
 - Kiev, Ukraine, Evangelistic Crusade – September 1993
 - South Africa (Johannesburg, Moolah Moolah), Church Planting, Evangelism, September 1997
 - Danli, Honduras, Church Planting – 1999-2001 (six trips)
 - Rincon de Dolores, Honduras – February 2004
 - Siguatepeque, Honduras – February 2008

WORKSHOPS LED

- Diocese of Chicago, May 2009, Congregational Development Seminar
- Diocese of Connecticut Clergy Conference, February 2008
- Diocese of Algoma, Canada, Clergy Conference, April 2008
- Diocese of Central Florida, Working with Remnant Congregations, October 2008
- Diocese of Texas Clergy Conference, April 2007
- Preaching to Gen X and Millennials
- Best Practices in Church Planting
- Building Blocks for Growing your Church Beyond 140
- Building Blocks for Growing the Pastoral-sized Church
- Five Keys for Positioning your Church for Growth
- Relating to a Postmodern Generation
- How to Start a Second Service
- Congregational Size Dynamics
- Vestry Orientation
- Strategic Planning
- Understanding Leadership
- Liturgy in a Postmodern Context
- Effective Outreach for the Turnaround Church
- The Large Church – Living with Excellence and Complexity

- Stewardship in the Large Church
- Using Financial Trustworthiness and Transparency to Foster Confidence
- Preparing Your Church to Welcome Newcomers
- Diffusion of Innovations
- Ministry of Healing in the Local Parish
- Small Group Leadership Training
- Power House of Prayer – Anglican Fellowship of Prayer
- Leading Change in Your Congregation Without Wreaking Havoc
- Forming the Vestry as a Leadership Community
- Evangelism

PUBLICATIONS**Books:**

Contemporary Anglican Worship in a Postmodern Era, Ann Arbor, MI, UMI, 2003

How to Hit the Ground Running: A Quick Start Guide to Congregations with New Leadership, New York, Church Publishing, 2005

Beyond Business as Usual: Vestry Leadership Development, New York, Church Publishing, 2007

The Practice of Leadership, New York, Church Publishing (in progress)

Articles:

"Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs" *Acts 29*, June 1991"

"Things I Didn't Learn in Seminary" *The Living Church*, April 27, 1997

"Beyond the Four Spiritual Laws" *Journal of Foreign Missions*, Summer 1999

"Relating to a Postmodern Generation" *The Living Church*, July 15, 2001

"Congregational Development According to Yogi" *The Living Church*, May 11, 2003

"The Network—An Ancient Practice Revisited" *The Living Church*, May 30, 2004

"Happy Talk" *The Living Church*, June 6, 2007

