

## Answers to the 5 essay questions

- 1. In the examination of bishops, you will be asked to “be one with the apostles proclaiming Christ’s resurrection and interpreting the Gospel, and to testify to Christ’s sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings.” What do you understand those words to mean, and (assuming their usual meaning) are there any you hesitate to endorse?**

The “things of first importance”—Paul’s grand first letter to the Corinthians summarizes the Good News that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.” The central message of Christianity is as critically important today as it was when first announced.

The resurrection vindicates Jesus’ high priestly work in giving himself once for all on the cross. It demonstrates his love and proves that his sacrifice for our sins was not in vain. It establishes Jesus as the long hoped for Messiah of Israel and the Lord of the world. This Good News defines my life. Jesus is my Lord; Christ died for me. I believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. I trust in the Lord; his Spirit lives within me, and he has changed my life completely and forever.

A bishop has a special role in stewarding this Gospel as a sacred trust to be received and then shared with all. The bishop is called to guard this Gospel as a good deposit. This shepherding role leads the flock to still waters and green pastures of abundant life while defending against the wolves and thieves that would harm and destroy the precious little ones.

This Gospel is the central message made lively by the regular proclamation in word and deed by the laity, bishops, priests, and deacons of the Diocese of Florida. The sovereign summons rings out as the revelation of God’s will for his creation. In the preaching of the Gospel, God’s plan to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head is fulfilled. The liberating power of the Gospel sets captives free from all manner of bondages that trouble the mind, heart, body, and soul. In the revelation of the mystery of the Gospel, God tears down dividing walls of hostility and makes all things new.

As I contemplate the political divides, the fragmentation of the church, the brokenness of this world, and the deep, deep loneliness felt by so many people, the incredible hope found in the person and work of Jesus Christ the Lord energizes me. Not only do I have no hesitation in endorsing the commitment to apostolic service, but I also recognize it as a sacred privilege.

- 2. Like other dioceses, the exit of congregations and communicants in the first decade of this century left lasting scars on our community from which we continue to heal. How have you fostered unity among individuals of differing values and diverse opinions?**

In the 16 October 2003 statement from Lambeth Palace, the Anglican Primates unanimously warned the path we were on would “tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level and may lead to further division.” Those were prophetic words. The tear ripped through the dioceses, parishes, and households of the Episcopal Church. It was as painful as a divorce and just as damaging. The global church, the national church, and the local one suffered. At the time, I served on the diocesan board. We sought to mediate peaceful resolutions. Churches were leaving the fellowship, and there were continual disputes to be settled. At the same time, I was dealing with the same issues at my church as a rector. Parishioners

were taking sides. Friendships were broken. Some people left; others stayed but the damage done was significant.

In his famous hymn, *The Church's One Foundation*, Samuel Stone laments of how the church is "sore oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed". Like a negative cycle where opposing forces reinforce and hasten the other's destructive influence, heresy and schism feed one another with broken trust, bitter anger, and sadness. Yet, political infighting is a distraction from the gospel. Jesus prayed that we would be one so that an unbelieving world would see God's purpose in him. The most important reason for the members of the church to strive toward visible unity in the truth of God's word is so that the world may know Jesus.

Healing is found in losing ourselves in God's mission. By fostering partner relationships with pastors and churches in other branches of Christianity and around the world, I have seen fruitful gospel work in my community that honors the name of Jesus. In my own congregations, I have seen growth through the struggles by keeping the main focus on worship of Jesus Christ and his mission to make disciples of all nations.

My aim is to stay out of the weeds of the church politics by focusing the energy and passion of God's people to evangelism, discipleship, and service in our communities and the world. We do not have the luxury or the time to fight each other over our sore divisions. There are greater battles and more significant challenges that need our current attention.

**3. One of the challenges that our denomination faces is an aging clergy force. What qualities are you looking for in the next generation of clergy leader?**

The clergy shortage is real. When I was ordained, I was one of only 50 (out of 8,000) clergy under the age of thirty in the Episcopal Church. Career clergy were more the exception than the rule as often bishops and canons to the ordinary discouraged young people from seeking ordination until they had more life experience. Thankfully that is no longer the case though we still suffer from a shortage of clergy. The church recognizes five equipping gifts for ministry: apostolic, prophetic, evangelical, teaching, and pastoral. Few people possess all these qualities, so it is important to identify and develop leaders with different spiritual gifts.

First and foremost, candidates for ordination must have a deep maturing relationship with Jesus Christ. Converted Christians beget more converted Christians. The faith is caught more than taught. Some of the most important places to find youthful zeal for God are college ministry and youth ministry. In these settings, the sense of call and identity in Christ are solidified. Vibrant diocesan support for these two areas will produce fruitful candidates. I would encourage strong seminary internship and scholarship programs throughout the diocese to help equip, test, and approve potential candidates and build a long-term partnership in ministry.

I also would aim to see the church raise up a more ethnically and racially diverse clergy force. The church envisioned by Jesus is made up of all nations, tribes, and tongues. While we have done a good job in including women in leadership, we need to do a much better job raising up clergy that reflect the

diversity of our neighborhoods, towns, and cities. This will require building new relationships and making new friends in Christ.

Lastly, we need to start early in training and recruiting. As we develop our children in the faith, where do we see opportunities for them to test their gifts and build ministry capacity? Older generations need to embrace and encourage younger ones. We are now seeing a new generation of youth known as "Generation Z." Many of them are totally disconnected from one another as well as the church. But they want to serve! Our schools and campus ministries will be invaluable in cultivating faith and introducing them to service. Every congregation could have the next ordinand in their ranks, if we will cultivate their faith, mentor them, encourage them, and allow them to shine.

**4. Almost two years have been spent in struggles with the COVID pandemic and the many social, political, and economic challenges it brought forward. Where do you see hope springing forward in the Episcopal church? What are some of your hopes for the Diocese of Florida?**

In many ways, the Covid pandemic has brought out the worst in people. Our nation has accelerated in its political rancor. The violence and civil unrest during the pandemic have shown that we are not united as a nation. Political discourse has all but broken down, and the pandemic has been a factor in amplifying the polarization rather than uniting. The pandemic has revealed vulnerabilities in the community and in our relationships. But these are Gospel opportunities for the church. Where civic leadership falls short, the power of the Spirit-filled church equipped with Christ's network of spiritual gifts, diversity of wisdom, and heart of compassion can stand in the gap.

The stay-at-home mandates, the mask protocols, and the concerns about community spread have greatly impacted in-person worship attendance. Many smaller congregations did not have the audio/visual capacities to move to a virtual ministry. Those that did mitigated the impact and became innovators. Finding online connection will often be the first step for a new person to "check out" the congregation before in-person attendance. The diocese must be an inventive leader in this area by leveraging the new tools.

The shutdown gave us a rare opportunity to reevaluate how we use our campuses for local community engagement and impactful mission. Virtual meetings proved quite effective enabling more collaboration, efficiency, and access to critical meetings where people can participate from office or home and not have to lose time to a meeting across long commutes.

The budgetary belt tightening can be hopeful if good process is utilized to reconsider spending priorities. In years of financial abundance and peace, it is easy to have gradual shifts in missional objectives, often resulting in unplanned long-term commitments. The Diocese of Florida can use this opportunity of tight finances and the bishop transition process to reevaluate and refine the mission, core values, and priorities for healthy spiritual and numerical growth. Like fasting during a prolonged lent, what will we give up in order that we might attain new life in Christ?

I also believe the political divisions and racial tensions provide opportunities for the Diocese and the congregations. The people of our communities are hungry for reconciliation and hope. My hope for the

Diocese of Florida is that it would leverage the ministry of reconciliation and build bridges in Christ across the typical divisions. Even through pandemics, we are called to be the salt and light.

**5. Being familiar with the profile published in connection with this search, what do you see as our diocese's biggest challenges/opportunities moving forward? And, based on your previous experiences, how have you addressed similar challenges or developed new opportunities?**

Clearly, the people of the diocese desire to see the diocese grow in numbers and reach out to new members and households. We know healthy churches grow and unhealthy ones struggle. The most effective tool I know for parish health is small group bible study. People in small groups are involved in one another's lives. They get excited about the Gospel, and it is reflected at Sunday worship. Members care about one another, and it spreads enthusiasm throughout the church.

So many congregations and ministries are stuck with seemingly intractable problems. Yet, problems are opportunities for growth and new life. Creativity is derived by embracing struggle and problems like treasure hunts for opportunities. As a certified mediator and conflict coach, I have helped many individuals, groups, and entire parishes get unstuck by creating clear Gospel-centered processes to address the intractable problems. God's resurrected people can always find amazing solutions through mature discussion.

Aging buildings, conflicts, departures, and now Covid have left many congregations with significantly reduced giving. Let's have honest discussion around reframing mission and ministry focus by asking good questions. Where do we see God's hand in what the church is doing? Is it in an ESL program, or a vibrant preschool, or in a healing prayer ministry? Where can we see and join God's work in our midst? There is the place to focus our attention and invest. They are the places where we will discover new growth and enthusiasm.

College campuses, as well as school ministry, could also impact the vitality of the diocese. Our chaplains need to be well trained, and well supported with prayer. Camp Weed is a center for renewal and revitalization, and can be used to host conferences, retreats, renewal weekends, and summer camps. Results from what is learned and experienced there can develop more committed Christians.

Our parishes are incarnate and embodied in diverse mission contexts. We are called to look for the least, the last, and the lost in our neighborhoods. We can ask ourselves, are the people that live and work around us underrepresented in our membership? Who are the people working and living within one mile of my church? Do I know them, what are their needs, hopes, and concerns? How could we build long-term Christian relationships of care and service with them? Diversity is all around us, hospitality is essential. Opportunities for connection and evangelism abound.