

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions and limit each answer to 300 words.

1. Why do you feel called to be a bishop? How does this call relate to your own personal and spiritual journey, and to your life of prayer and study?

Part of the wisdom in how we call bishops in the Episcopal Church is the very nature of the discernment that happens within the process itself. We consider this a holy time of exploration—even regarding the question of whether-or-not a person feels called the episcopate. Therefore, by entering this process with you I seek to discern if I am called to the episcopate trusting in the leading of the Holy Spirit to guide our mutual journey.

As I have reflected on my own ministerial gifts in light of a possible call to episcopacy, I believe that a bishop is not so much called to an office but to a place and a people. I already have a deep fondness for Vermont—its people, places, and way of life—based on family ties to the area that have led to a lifetime of visits. I have also immersed myself in your profile, which reminded me how much I already love the people and places of that region. Secondly, I believe a bishop should be a vision keeper for the diocese they serve—someone who can delight in the gifts of the moment while still guiding a diocese to a place of fuller ministry. Through conversations with my spiritual director, family, and friends, as well as through my work as a rector, I sense that gift of vision keeping has grown within me and I would be interested in dialoguing with the Diocese of Vermont to see if that's the kind of ministry that is needed from your bishop. Finally, I believe that we are in a time when important changes are needed in our society and in our church. Our nation is in turmoil and the church has been in steep decline for decades. I have felt a growing sense of urgency to help the church in this moment find new and vibrant way to bring our life-changing message of Christ's love to the world. As Rector of St. Christopher's, I have worked together with our leadership to strengthen the lay ministries of our parish, to expand our offerings, and pastor the wider community. Thus, I sense I have gifts of creativity, experience, and knowledge that can help a diocese live faithfully into this current milieu.

2. After reading our profile, why have you discerned that your gifts, talents, skills, and experiences have led you to sense a call to become the bishop for The Episcopal Church in Vermont?

I was intrigued by the spirit of adventure and creativity that I read in your profile. It witnesses to a people who are reaching for new and holy ways to be Church. Ways that are creative, imaginative, and adaptive and not afraid to live differently in service to Christ's mission. My experience and gifts have helped me to be an effective leader for groups that are actively following the Spirit's call to change and grow. Your profile also calls to collaborative leadership and that is exactly the kind of community process invigorates and sustains me.

At the last General Convention, the Episcopal Church prioritized three areas—Racial Reconciliation, Creation Care, and Evangelism. I was so moved by that call to action that they have become internal markers for my own ministry and I was excited to see all three mentioned in some

form within your profile. Racial reconciliation includes matters of economic justice, gun control, and drug abuse and I have worked hard my whole ministry to be an advocate for social justice in those areas, believing it to be a large component to living out the Gospel call. Creation care has been an important to me since I was born. My father is a sustainable forester who taught me to love and respect the planet and I believe that any church organization has an imperative to live into its role as a steward of creation, especially in the face of rapid climate change. Finally, the role of evangelism, especially in a state that has such few people who identify as religious, will be critical to the life and vitality of the diocese. I have both experience and gifts in helping people claim the often uncomfortable (for Episcopalians) mantle of evangelism in ways that are authentic and missional.

3. Please tell us about your experience working with small congregations, part-time clergy, and within a mutual ministry framework.

While I have been blessed to worship and work in congregations of all sizes, it has been the gifts that I learned in the small parishes—the gifts of how to be resourceful stewards, creative, and collaborative—that I have found most useful in ministry. I bring that spirit of adaptability that I first learned in small churches into my local ministry, to the diocese, and to the wider Episcopal Church.

One way that adaptability has been used was in the calling of our Associate Priest. Like many Episcopal Churches, we have struggled in the last decade to grow in our family and youth ministries. We knew that our current practices and culture were no longer offering families what they needed to flourish in their Christian lives. After much experimentation, we discerned that we needed to call an Associate Priest to help us continue to support this change, but not follow an older model of a traditional “youth pastor.” Rather, we hoped to find someone who would go out to places we knew families to be—places like the soccer field. However, we were limited in our financial abilities to do so. Thus, our search process was intentional in hoping to join with another church or institution that would be looking for a similar kind of priest. Eventually, we joined with one of our outreach partners, St. James’ School, which educates underprivileged children in one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in Philadelphia. Their newly ordained part-time chaplain and religion teacher was a perfect match for both communities. Today and we share his talents which has brought both organizations closer in ministry and mission. This example of adaptive mutual ministry has been incredibly beneficial for both communities and has had the unexpected benefit of drawing both outreach partners closer together in mission.

4. How do you envision encouraging, educating, and deploying deacons in Vermont?

One of the most exciting parts of your profile was the way it lifted up of the vocation of deacons. In my own life, I worked side-by-side with a vocational deacon (The Rev. Liz Miller) to run the daily soup kitchen in Trinity Parish where I served as curate. Her passion for blending the Christian faith with social justice was deeply influential on me as a young priest. She taught me that deacons, much like the prophets, have the gift of envisioning a world that is built on justice and community. Given the widespread need for social reconciliation and creation care, the role of deacons in the Church will only increase.

Because of the way in which the Diocese of Vermont has already been so forward-thinking in the encouragement, education, and deployment of deacons, I believe there are some unique opportunities that could be explored. One such opportunity might include a regular gathering for continuing education as well as exploring timely social issues would mean that the deacons could lead diocesan responses to those needs. They could be deployed to help teach churches how to do community organizing work in their local areas. Deacons also help to supply much needed liturgical support to congregations. Thus, deploying them into churches that need vision and support would be of the utmost importance. I also think that the Diocese of Vermont would be well served to increase its missional and service ties with programs such as the Episcopal Service Corps that help young people find their vocations. Having deacons serve as mentors in such service organizations would be life changing for many.

4. Is there anything else you would like us to know about you?

From a very young age, I felt called to the ordained ministry. In fact, my “call moment” is my earliest memory. I was sitting on the floor of my baby sister’s bedroom watching dust particles float on a sunbeam. I distinctly remember having the thought that the dust was the Holy Spirit and that I should catch it and give it to other people, because that was what priests did and that’s God wanted me to do. Ever since, I have been striving to do just that!

In addition to parish ministry, I am also a published author in both the Church and the academy. My Doctorate in Ministry (DMin) from Drew University included a concentration on worship, preaching, and reconciliation. I have had the opportunity to serve on several diocesan and national church-wide ministries, as well as in ecumenical and interfaith ministries, dating back to when I was a teenager. The opportunity to travel extensively while preaching and teaching on a variety of topics has been a great blessing. I have also developed an online community called The Hive ([www,thehiveapiary.com](http://www.thehiveapiary.com)), which is centered around wellness and spirituality practices. I am a yoga instructor, a bee keeper, and a musician. I also have other hobbies, including skiing, hiking, gardening, and leading my daughter’s girl scout troop. I am married to Ken Raining, a reference librarian, and we have a daughter, Delia, who is our light and joy!