



Candidate Essay Responses

The Rev. Adam Shoemaker

- 1. The Apostle Paul writes that “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord” (1 Corinthians 12:4–5). The Diocese of Long Island encompasses remarkable diversity—geographic (from Brooklyn to the Hamptons), cultural (multiple languages and traditions), socioeconomic, and theological. Yet we are called to be one Body of Christ. Describe a time when you have led or participated in ministry that brought together diverse communities while honoring their distinct gifts and identities. How did you navigate the tension between unity and particularity? What theological and practical approaches guide your understanding of how the Church can be both authentically diverse and genuinely unified?**

An example of my experience fostering unity in diversity is as a founding member of “Three Churches United,” a collaboration of St. Stephen’s, St. Mark’s, and Historic Calvary, three historically African American parishes in downtown Charleston. These congregations, despite their common history, have evolved in varying ways. The gentrification of Charleston has shifted the demographics to the point that, today, there exists significant diversity of racial identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomics, cultural norms, and even theological perspectives amongst the three parishes. At times, this has led to insularity that has kept the communities separate.

A couple of years ago, I began to meet with the clergy of St. Mark’s and Calvary to envision the possibility of a partnership as both a way to respond to the gentrified realities of our city and out of a shared conviction that collaboration across difference is a missional imperative in the world in which we live. The three clergy began by building relationships with one another and, in time, gradually pulling in lay leadership. We mutually agreed that the tensions between unity and particularity are best navigated through incarnational experiences of worship, ministry, and common life.

The three clergy, representative of different racial identities, modeled that unity in the way we interacted with one another. We were solicitous of one another’s presence in corporate worship and in our justice work. As lay leaders began to join us, we found ways to both celebrate the unique identities and contributions of each parish while envisioning what more we could do together. Like any relational work, this has taken time as we have begun to add in a rhythm of worship and work as “Three Churches United.”

Over the last year, we have established the practice of holding joint worship 2-3 times a year hosted by one of the three churches. We have organized a racial justice pilgrimage to key Civil Rights sites through the Southeast and have plans to take a second trip to Washington, D.C. to focus on present day advocacy. A leadership team of lay leaders helps guide our work and the three churches have started attending diocesan learning days together and offered trainings around advocacy or

Eucharistic visiting. We are now in a better place to be collectively responsive when urgent matters arise related to the common good.

The “Three Churches United” has begun to be replicated in other areas of our diocese and has become an integral part of the continuing work of our diocesan Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission. In an era when many of us are having to learn how to navigate declining numbers and less financial resources, we have found this collaboration incredibly energizing. New relationships have formed with missional potential. While still distinct communities of the Diocese of South Carolina, our three-church partnership has forged new opportunities while also inspiring the life of our diocese and city.

As I look to the richly diverse landscape of the Diocese of Long Island, I see similar opportunities for the Spirit’s unifying work across difference. My experience with a venture like the “Three Churches United” has taught me that authentic unity is not found in erasing distinctions but in honoring them as gift of the Body of Christ. As bishop, I would strive to be a pastor for all people, fostering relationships of mutual respect and shared mission among the congregations so that, together, we might reflect the fullness of God’s kingdom.

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2. **Jesus said, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old” (Matthew 13:52). The Episcopal Church is rooted in ancient tradition—Scripture, sacraments, and the historic episcopate—yet we live in a rapidly changing world that requires fresh expressions of timeless truths. Reflect on a situation where you helped a Christian community honor its foundational traditions while adapting to contemporary challenges or opportunities. How do you discern when change serves faithfulness and when it undermines it? What is your vision for how the Church can be both deeply rooted and creatively responsive in our current cultural moment?**

I believe all sustainable efforts at innovation should be grounded not only in our traditions but also in the contextual realities and calling of any given congregation. In the case of St. Stephen’s, the parish discerned, prior to my arrival, a call to be more responsive to young families with children. This was about more than pining after a long sought-after demographic but instead a growing awareness of an increasing number of young families within an easy distance to the parish and a sense St. Stephen’s offered a compelling community for such families.

My own family’s arrival brought an early influx of younger congregants to the parish that led to a time of discernment to consider what more we could offer and how might do that within the Episcopal tradition. A taskforce of vestry members, clergy, and parents began to consider options. This work led the congregation to the strategic risk of investing in a second full-time priest to oversee our ministry to children and youth. We revamped formation programming and, in time, began to think about offering a third Sunday service.

Our Associate Rector, who came on board with the charge to ultimately implement this worship offering, helped us identify an appropriate time, a musician and crafted a simplified liturgy that followed the structure of a prayer book Eucharist. The sermon time and prayers were decided to be interactive and invitational to engage the young people present. Children were invited to join the clergy around the altar for the Eucharistic prayer and child lectors and worship assistants have been incorporated into the rhythm of this worshipping community.

As this worship service has developed, our clergy have remained in conversation with one another and our bishop to always ensure that the innovative nature of the service remains grounded within our tradition. While still smaller than our choral Eucharist at 11:00am, this 9:00am worship service has become a sustainable and much beloved liturgy that helps to form our younger families in Episcopal worship. This offering has helped our parish triple the active participation of families with children and youth in our parish and become a vital part of the congregation.

I believe my experience with this service, among other innovative experiments in my ministry, have taught me that change serves faithfulness when it is always grounded both in the prayerful discernment of a community of faith and in the way of Jesus. When this is lost, things get unmoored and the faith and mission of the church is undermined. Amid our ever-changing times, churches should always be discerning who is outside their doors and how the church can better meet people where the needs are. This work will vary greatly depending on the context but must always be grounded in our faith in Christ as the cornerstone.

I believe the innovative possibilities for a richly diverse diocese such as Long Island will look different depending on the context. As bishop, I would make it a priority to not only get to know the different congregations of the diocese but work to provide resources for congregational discernment around innovative opportunities for ministry. It would be my aim to encourage a spirit of experimentation to bring the best of our sacramental life and Episcopal way to meet the needs of the communities we serve.

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- 3. Moses learned from his father-in-law Jethro that effective leadership requires both personal attention to individuals and systematic organization of the community (Exodus 18:13–26). Episcopal ministry demands both tender pastoral care and sophisticated institutional stewardship, especially in a complex diocese with multiple corporations, schools, and ministries. Describe your experience balancing hands-on pastoral ministry with strategic organizational leadership. How have you maintained spiritual groundedness while exercising administrative responsibility? Share a specific example of how you have integrated prayer and discernment with practical decision-making in a leadership role. What sustains you spiritually in the demands of institutional ministry?**

As a Rector, I greatly enjoy strategic visioning with the leadership of the parishes I serve. One of my guiding passages of scripture in this work is Jeremiah 29:7: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have put you ... for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” For me, strategic visioning is about just that: human flourishing, not just for a congregation that occupies a church campus but for the wider community that surrounds that congregation. It’s not just about helping a community of faith to better understand who God is calling them to be but also about the mission field God is inviting them to engage. Pastoral relationships are at the center of this work not only to better understand one’s context and gifts but to ultimately practice good delegation of authority in a collaborative manner.

While serving as Rector of the Church of the Holy Comforter in Burlington, North Carolina, I spent considerable time building relationships not only with the members of the congregation but also with the residents of the neighborhoods around our campus. In time, this led to the identification of prayerful conversation partners and leaders that quickly widened the circle of who felt a sense of ownership and belonging in our parish. This relational work led to a major effort to open a bilingual

preschool at Holy Comforter, the first of its kind in the county, to not only support our Latino neighbors around the parish but to also build a more integrated sense of community that many found lacking in the Burlington area at the time.

The effort to open this school, leveraging unused space on our parish's campus, was a multilayered effort that involved not only engaging the vestry and congregation but forming a leadership team with representation from the surrounding neighborhoods. I brought together stakeholders from the parish, the Latino community, and nearby Elon University to help guide a way forward. In time, a board and chairperson were named, grant monies were awarded to refurbish our space, and personnel was hired. The day of the ribbon cutting to celebrate the opening of the school was a celebration of the diversity of the greater Burlington community. There were people of many backgrounds, cultures, and languages drawn together in common purpose and mission.

The effort to open this school was not easy. It involved a measure of strategic risk from the parish and prayerful discernment with the vestry. Regular communication had to be maintained with city leaders and trust had to be built with a marginalized community. What sustained me in this effort was my prayer life and conviction that Christ's presence is made known to us amid the wondrous diversity that God puts in front of us. The diversity I encountered through this effort strengthened and inspired me and helped me learn to increasingly share authority in ways that continue to sustain my work as an institutional leader.

This major effort, amid others in my ministry, has taught me not only the importance of crafting a strategic vision but also of the level of collaboration needed to realize effective implementation. As bishop of a diocese such as Long Island, I would seek to discern a staffing structure around me that ensures the visioning we do can be effectively brought to fruition. I would also prioritize time to allow me to do the relational work essential to shepherding and leading such a diverse community of God's people.

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4. **The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14–30) teaches both gratitude for God's gifts and accountability for their use. The Diocese of Long Island has been blessed with significant financial resources, talented people, and institutional assets, yet faces real challenges including declining membership and aging infrastructure in some areas. Reflect on a time when you helped a community or organization move from scarcity-thinking to abundance-thinking, or vice versa—when you helped address complacency about resources. How do you approach the tension between celebrating gifts and addressing genuine challenges? What does faithful stewardship look like when resources are both significant and limited? How do you inspire generosity while ensuring sustainability?**

During the ministry I have shared with the people of St. Stephen's, the parish has experienced a significant transformation in its financial resources and sense of self. Prior to my arrival, the parish was unsure if it could sustain a full-time Rector. There was limited staff and a sense of what was possible. Today, we maintain a multi-clergy staff, supported by a pledge base that has doubled in recent years, and are just finishing full campus renovations made possible by a capital campaign. We have grown our base of young families with children and engaged in new ministries in our wider community.

I would attribute this season of fruitfulness to collaborative efforts to help our wonderful

congregation begin to see itself as what I once heard former Presiding Bishop Michael Curry describe as a “lighthouse congregation.” St. Stephen’s enjoys a wonderfully diverse sense of self with a significant LGBTQ population. A historically African American parish, the spirit and sense of mission in our city and beyond have always been palpable. Our parish, once maligned in our pre-schism diocese, is now a leader in support of our bishop’s vision. In this shift, we have worked to celebrate our past so as to help inform our present and future. We have pushed further into the community and now see ourselves as a resource for the work of justice and equity beyond our doors. This sense of mission has brought new collaborations and many new faces into the parish.

Larger numbers and greater financial resources bring gifts but also greater scrutiny in how we are stewarding what God has provided us. During the feasibility study that led to our capital campaign, we wrestled as a congregation not only with a changed sense of self but also in what we were called to do in the future. This discernment work led us to prioritize leveraging our campus and our resources for mission work beyond the congregation in collaboration with our diocese. Our new parish hall, for example, is being envisioned as a community space to serve not just the congregation but other constituencies such as local college students impacted by cuts to DEI. We also have carved out an apartment, with support from our diocese and in partnership with nearby St. Mark’s, to house a new young adult program to form the next generation of leaders around issues of justice and equity. My time as President of the Standing Committee of the Diocese of South Carolina, working closely with our bishop, has also been instructive in how to move from scarcity to abundance while faithfully stewarding finite resources for the welfare of all. As a historic diocese post-schism we have been learning how to be more agile with limited resources while investing in a set of three primary priorities grounded in our context:

1. historically disenfranchised communities of the diocese
2. returning congregations to the diocese and
3. congregations that lost their properties during the schism.

These examples remind me of the importance of not only of a shared vision but of forging a shared future grounded in the belief that God calls us to remain accountable to one another. As bishop, I would work for a shared strategic plan with representative voices from across the diocese of Long Island mindful, as we have been in South Carolina, of the historically disenfranchised. Wherever possible, staffing and funding should be invested in realizing the kind of equity we so often yearn to see in the wider world.

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5. **Jesus prayed “that they may all be one” (John 17:21), yet he also sent disciples out “two by two” (Mark 6:7) to serve in their particular contexts. The Diocese of Long Island includes parishes that are geographically distant and culturally distinct, each with unique ministries and challenges, yet all called to be part of one diocesan family. Describe your experience building connection and collaboration across differences—whether geographic, cultural, theological, or institutional. How have you strengthened relationships while respecting autonomy? Share a specific example of how you have helped separate communities or organizations discover a shared mission, without losing their distinctive identities. What practices or principles guide you in fostering both unity and local empowerment?**

One of the most diverse organizations I have ever led is the Charleston Area Justice Ministry (or CAJM), a ministry that aims to organize forty different faith communities to advocate before their

elected officials for the sake of the common good. CAJM's membership includes Christian, Jewish, and Muslim faith communities as well as student organizations affiliated with local colleges in the Charleston area. This tremendous diversity of culture, geography, faith identity, and experience are great strengths and yet the differences can be challenging to navigate.

During my two-year tenure as Co-President of CAJM, I worked with the Executive Board and organizers on staff to consider tangible ways that the bonds between the various communities could be strengthened through increased opportunities for relationship building amongst the network members. We worked not only to offer opportunities for the members to share stories and build relationships but also the faith leaders. Facilitated conversations with leadership were necessary to work on exactly how individual integrity could be had even as we took collective action as a very diverse community.

The recent conflict in the Middle East brought significant challenges during my tenure that led to challenges in maintaining the active participation of both our Jewish and Muslim membership. In this moment, the diverse roots of my personal identity provided a perspective that was helpful to preserving relationships with the leadership and members of these communities amid this time of tension. Navigating this time necessitated frequent visits to faith leaders and many phone calls with concerned members.

The primary principle that guides me in this kind of work is the conviction that Christ calls us to live our life in community. Absent this, we lose sight of who we are and whose we are. The diversity of this world should be seen as a gift that God has given us in all its wonderful particularity. I can honor that diversity as reflective of the divine imprint even as I remain anchored in Christ.

Amid the Christian family of faith, Christ is always the center and our cornerstone. Individual communities will have different callings based on their context, individual gifts, and unique opportunities. Varieties of worship, piety, and practice can all be honored as wonderful

expressions of the diversity of our "Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement." And yet, that diversity never negates our fundamental unity as disciples of Jesus and members of the body of Christ. We all remain called, as our prayer book puts it, to "restore all to unity with God and one another in Christ." This experience leading a complex and diverse organization underscores for me the importance not only of relationship building but good, transparent communication. As I consider the complexity of a diocese such as Long Island, stretching from Montauk to Brooklyn, as bishop, I would prioritize remaining in close contact with the parishes and missions, the priests, deacons, and lay leaders, so as to better appreciate the distinctive gifts of the diocese even as we forge a common mission together. At the same time, I would regularly communicate with the entire diocese so as to ensure a better understanding of where we are heading in our work and witness in the world.