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WRITTEN STATEMENT OF  
MINISTRY FOR THE EPISCOPAL  
ELECTION FOR THE DIOCESE OF  
EDMONTON

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The Right Reverend Christopher Harper



MAY 28, 2021

**Spiritual Formation:** I am a cradle Anglican brought up and familiar with both the Christian and Tradition practices of the Plains Cree. My home reserve is Onion Lake – Seekascootch Makaoo. I was raised both on and off the reserve. I graduated High School in Camrose Alberta, where I met and married my wife Tracy, presently our two children (now adults) are on their own and married with amazing partners, from whom we are blessed with each couple having two children of their own, giving to Tracy and I, four Grandchildren. We travelled much of our lives and this meant that we worshipped where ever we could, this gave me a broad understanding of faith traditions and practice. So, I can openly say that I am Indigenous and Anglican in practice, trying to find balance and peace within has been a lifelong endeavor, thus my focus on bridge building. Striving to reach out to both sides of my being and ever seeking to find peace and healing in the journey with others. God has blessed me with an amazing wife Tracy who has walked with me in most of my life and faith. Together we are a strong couple, she knows the struggles of racism through our journey together, she knows of my internal battle at times to be anything but indigenous so that my family might have an easier time. She has been my strength and calmness when I would desire to say something and correct... too often together, we have prayed for peace. This is why I strive to teach and witness that all nations and people should not be painted with one brush of rejection, but instead should be embraced through continuous acknowledgment, teaching and understanding. Our church is not perfect, because we are an imperfect people, institutional racism exists and is perpetuated, still God loves and blesses us with forgiveness and hope and the Holy Spirit, who abides with us in the present, leading to new life in ministry and new hope in our broken world. We together as Canadians and people of faith, have been called to acknowledge and walk in the spirit of the '94 Calls to Action' and 'Marks of Mission' as a ministry. As much as the 'Grandfather Teachings' and the 'Marks of Mission' go before us, so too should we lift them as our banner of witness to faith and new life in Christ the Peacemaker.

I attended seminary later in life, and in seminary I studied with a focus on church history and understanding our polity and liturgical development. This means that in my internship I was able to grow in practice and understand of what we in the Anglican church call High and Low Church practice, both of which are exemplified in our Prayerbooks of the BCP and the BAS. I grew up with low church understanding well developed and in seminary studied in mostly high church. In summary, I can sing the Holy Communion liturgy and use incense, and have done everything from a modified and very low mass to high pontifical style mass. I was blessed to study with ecumenical professors and teachers who expanded my ministry horizon so that I might embrace and balance all aspects of ministry from social justice, to faith foundational, scriptural studies and the enabling of ministry in the expanse of Laity to Holy Orders. Pastoral care, I have been told is my strong suit, this being enhanced with my time in Emergency Services work as an advanced EMT-A. My leadership skills were developed in my work as a Manager and Director of Operations, a Restaurateur, and an independent Instructor of First Aid and of Emergency Medical Responders.

Education is primary in ministry, it should be available and encouraging for all people of God to uplift their ministry to the glory of God, and I believe the Diocese should be able to enable. Lay ministry and/or locally raised lay ministers, are essential and foundational in supporting and maintaining the ministry as a whole. Clergy need their Lay Readers and parish leadership needs the lay ministers to enhance the whole of ministry in their parishes. It is essential for the leadership of the diocese to consult and assist in the discerning of the ministry of our parishes, the Committee of Examining Chaplains are essential in this aspect. Our setting in the western prairies bring us challenges in equipping the ministry of tomorrow, and thus the need for our own western ministry development, needs prayerful encouragement within the diocese and western provinces.

**Administration and Leadership:** I was blessed to have seven and a half years appointed to a parish which blessed my ministry with love and support, they still are considered my faith family and there is not a day that I do not give thanks for their shaping me and enabling me in ministry. The hardest part was when I heard the call of God and knew that it was my time to move on, I would have easily desired to stay and retire in that ministry, but I also knew that God has a plan, and that someone else needed the parishes blessing and upbringing. This is where I find myself in the present moment, the Diocese of Saskatoon has been a great blessing and challenge (Episcopal ministry is never easy), and again I hear God calling and I have to give myself over to whatever the Spirit of God leads and opens before me, this is my present giving or offering myself in discernment. God's Spirit and will, can and does move us all, we just need to respond faithfully and in faith.

I personally believe that the church and our shared ministry is all about opening ourselves to the moving of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit moves and is alive in the world around us, this is given evidence in the variety of communities and their individual strengths, As the Spirit blessed the Apostles at Pentecost, enabling them to speak in languages not their own, proclaiming the glory of God to all nations in their language and context so too does the ministry continue today. We as a church need to be able to allow the Spirit to work in our varied communities and ministries. The Spirit is alive and the church needs to be alive and adapting to the season and world. The ministry of the church is relevant and has an important role to play in our world of the present, maybe even more so in this present season of the pandemic. Technology and online ministry have reached out to those who through time and season have been unable to attend church and the online ministry has opened doors of opportunity by reaching out to all peoples in their context of home life, and maybe even inviting those who may have never graced the doors of our localized churches. I know that in listening to clergy and ministry teams that services are a growing and learning process and encouragement is always needed to continue in the unfamiliarity of new ministry technologies. Our clergy have had to respond in this time in new and challenging ways and for most, this is a daily struggle. It is important for the bishop to acknowledge this reality and work with them, supporting every tentative step. Technology can be a boon as well as a burden, but if all aspects of ministry work together the blessing of God will be far and wide. Every parish in the Diocese should be familiar with their

Bishop and I believe in being in the parish as much or more than being in the office. The officers of the Diocese should not need to be micro-managed; the bishop should be out being the pastoral support of the ministry teams of the diocese. If respect of our roles and ministry is enabled then all will be blessed and the ministry as a whole will grow. As a Bishop I ask that clergy be prayerfully true to God and themselves, as they have been called, blessed and equipped, that they give back the same in the ministry that they have been called and appointed to.

The ministry to which we all have been called to is to the people of God and that means that we need to pastorally acknowledge and work within their context and space. The variety of God's creation is evident in the people, our personal politics, sensitivities and brokenness is what we are and what we far too often exhibit in life and our faith. This means that the church is not perfect because we abide in an imperfect world, we use imprecise language to relay God's perfect love and call, yet in all this God still loves and blesses us, thus our need to pray first thing in the morning for strength to do what is right and do it better than yesterday. The world looks in on the church through social media and thus our need to be more than aware of our surroundings and actions. A bishop should be especially conscious of this truth, words carry weight and cannot easily be drawn back. Thus, all ministry needs be done prayerfully and thoughtfully. We cannot change the past but we can control ourselves in the moment before us. Thus, a bishop needs to be a prayerful diplomat and leader, speaking for and representing all in the diocese by word and action. Bishops serve with a blessed and courageous cohort, who share in ministry their prayerful wisdom and guidance, all appointed in diocesan ministry bring their blessing to the glory of God in the ministry of the church, and it is together that any diocese is strengthened and emboldened.

**Collaboration, Pastoral Care and Support:** As parishes differ throughout the diocese ministry needs to adapt to the local context, the urban setting differs from the rural and understanding these nuances can build ministry. The diversity of the urban setting and the historical founding of the rural just mean minor shifts in thinking and implementing of ministry. Clergy that respond to a call in either setting do so with either hope and need, prayer and focus. The independence and some level of isolation of rural ministry versus the collaborative and homogenous ministry of the urban, needs the support and presence of the bishop, from the furthest ends in Jasper in the west to Frog Lake in the east, ministry should know their bishop and have availability to their bishop.

A bishop needs to be committed to a greater sense of diversity of communities and peoples. Having an Indigenous background is who I am and indigenous ministry in our changing and adapting context is a ministry that is growing. Inclusive ministry is the common word used today, but still, we find ourselves in conflict seeking to truly understand and accept others in the family of God. The church needs to be able to exemplify the acceptance of our Lord who calls all to the table, if we are to truly be a welcoming church, we need to open our hearts and

prayerfully humble ourselves, seeking to treat all with respect, offering peace and hope. All minority groups BIPOC, LGBTQ2S+, should feel the peace and embracing of our ministry.

I have done many workshops and retreats with focus on what our shared and combined ministry might look like. I've participated in panel discussions, PowerPoint presentations to parishes opening the door to healing and understanding their neighbors who might differ from themselves. Prejudice is too easy, because this means that we do not have to try to meet anyone half way, especially if they do not fall within our accepting standards. Our role in the church and ministry calls us to tend the sheep and feed the lambs of God, not to change them into something more agreeable to ourselves. I believe that clergy have this important and vital role in ministry to lead by example, bless as they are blessed and to guide the children of God's creation by word and sacrament. Our ministry of justice, equality and advocacy is revealed in all that we say and do. and should be our witness of prayerful faith to all before us. We see this in our ecumenical endeavors, seeking to walk in faith and growing together in God our Creator.

The church of today can make a difference and we in the church need to believe this. The church is relevant and significant in a world that cries out for truth and hope. The message that we proclaim needs to be lived out in all that we say and do, our faith is and should always be a living faith, adapting to the need, supporting the weak, feeding the hungry, lifting the fallen and guiding the lost. Together in the Diocese of Edmonton, the clergy uplifted and blessed to know that they are loved and supported not only by their parishes and communities but also by their leadership in the bishop. I believe that the Diocese of Edmonton has done and will do even greater things, not because of a new bishop but because the Diocese of Edmonton can do it together in the Spirit of God Almighty.

I believe the Diocese of Edmonton will grow, by growing in understanding and acknowledgement of those who are around them in the people of God. All Nations and all people walking together in faith, being a truly welcoming church to all the world. This begins when we accept that we are loved by God and that we are called to love, forgive and bless others as we would desire to be loved, forgiven and blessed.

I thank the Diocese of Edmonton for this opportunity to seek the will of God through the moving of the Spirit. I remain in prayer and ask your prayers for all the nominees in this Diocesan Electoral Synod. God's will be done to the Glory of God in ministry. Amen

Peace and blessings,

Bishop Christopher Harper