

Personal Statement: The Rev. Dr. Thomas Brauer

A. A Spiritual Autobiography

I grew up in and around Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, at the height of the Charismatic renewal of the '70s and early '80s. It was a time of rich and deep ecumenism when Christians of Anglican, Catholic, Lutheran, United Church, and many other backgrounds, worked together to teach each other, build one another up in faith, and to worship the Lord together in the power and unity of the Holy Spirit.

My family struggled with poverty when I was a small child. I remember long periods of eating little other than oatmeal, potatoes, or spaghetti only barely covered in thin tomato sauce. Vegetables and meat were too expensive. But my mother was a woman of deep faith, and despite raising two boys on her own in 'rural poverty' she never lost her faith. Prayer, worship, and the life of Christ were core to her strength. In all things, Jesus was her centre.

Sadly, when I was in grade 6 or grade 7, a devastating rift occurred in our local Anglican community. It hurt many people and my mother was among them. We stopped attending.

Around the same time, I discovered I had a talent for the technical side of the performing arts and from the age of 12 spent the vast majority of my free time supporting plays and concerts while learning my craft. By the time I was 18 I had worked on countless shows including Winton Marsalis, Marcel Marceau, Bachman Turner Overdrive, Colin James, etc. These experiences sent me to Toronto where I continued to work and learn in the industry. But it wasn't nearly as much fun as I had hoped it would be. I felt pretty empty. One night, alone and lonely, I asked the Lord what he wanted me to do. What transpired cannot be written down easily, but I can say that I came away certain that I was called by Jesus Christ to become an Anglican priest.

It took 10 years to get from that moment to beginning studies at Wycliffe College, an ordination candidate for the Diocese of Edmonton. Since then, I have continued to grow, to learn, and to discover ever greater depths of encounter with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I am proud to say that this last year has been the year in which I have grown in my faith the most. But I would have said that a year ago, too – and the year before that. I pray that every year I will be able to say the same thing.

B. Giving special attention to the local requirements (Section 6), what gifts and skills do you bring to the role of Bishop in the Diocese of Edmonton?

No one has all the knowledge, skills, or gifts to execute every aspect of ministry listed in Section 6 equally well, but that is always true in ministry. This is why I have always sought to collaborate with people who have gifts and skills I don't have. That said, I understand my vocational expression of *episcopate* (oversight, guiding, protecting and caring for others) to be rooted heavily in *diakonia* (servanthood). The service of the other is central to the episcopal ministries of oversight, visioning, maintaining unity, leading transformation, and enabling the ministry of others. While the examples of Peter and Paul are often (and rightly) upheld as paradigms of *episcopate*, I think a better example of how I experience *episcopate* can be read in Mary's hymn, the *Magnificat* (Luke 2:46ff). In this hymn, God is revealed as one who draws close, and is intimately interested in the needs and concerns of

the other, whether it is the individual (Mary), the group (the humble, the hungry), or the nation (his servant Israel). As Mary sings, she praises God's service, protection, and upholding of those who serve him, and his overturning of human systems that uphold the powerful and demean the humble. The ministry of *episcopate* that arises in response to this sees the awe-filled worship of the God-who-draws-near as central to all expressions of ministry – whether liturgical, pastoral, or prophetic; it leads the Church to participate with God in overturning the spiritual and temporal powers and principalities that crush the humble; it seeks to bless those for whom God has done great things, and to build up all who dedicate themselves to the Lord's service. For me, the *Magnificat*, in its expression of both Mary's character and God's character, exemplifies the character of *episcopate*.

6.1 Spiritual and Educational Formation

Over the past 20 years, God has called me and my family to serve and learn in five provinces of the Anglican Communion across four continents. Through this, I have been formed by the diversity of the Anglican traditions expressed around the world. I am as happy to preach and celebrate in the liberal catholic tradition of the Scottish Episcopal Church as I am in the evangelical-charismatic parish I currently serve, or in the broad-church tradition of much of the Anglican Church of Canada. I have learned through my various roles that whatever style or tradition we prefer, whether we identify as liberal or conservative, most of us are simply doing the best we can to know and serve Jesus, to understand the Bible, to worship God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to bring to the world the hope, promise, and justice of faith in Jesus. There is far more that unites than divides us.

To build the unity and effectiveness of our churches, however, we need to amend the ways in which we select and form people for ministry, the ways we communicate the Gospel, and the ways we structure ourselves. I agree with the profile that flexibility will be required in these processes, for the reasons listed there, and also as we explore the questions of diversity and inclusion in our systems and structures and overturn the pattern of church-decline that has arisen despite solid teaching and encouragement for mission.

6.2 Administration and Leadership

I have overseen teams at parish and diocesan ministry levels, even as I have served as a parish priest, a mission leader/church planter, and a diocesan executive. These experiences, combined with my roles on diocesan and provincial boards and committees, have given me a strong understanding of the administrative skills and nuance required in contemporary ministry. In many of these roles it was my responsibility to help the church at local, diocesan, and provincial levels to understand what and how we need to change to meet the needs of present and future challenges. As a result, in every diocese I have served as a priest, I have been asked to help develop or update their growth and mission strategies and Mission Action Plans.

This means that I am aware of and support many creative approaches to being Church, and I have supported approximately 20 different church plants and mission expressions in Canada, Scotland, and New Zealand. This includes initiating the radical restructuring of the ministry and funding models of a three-point charge in post-industrial Fife (Scotland). Through this restructure, funds were found to redevelop one of the three buildings, to support full-time ministry, and to re-shape the charge into a Centre of Mission, filled with hope and promise.

It has also meant that I have learned to walk delicate political realities in the life of the church. One of the most challenging and risky arose in response to the New Zealand church's approach to allowing the blessing of same-sex civil unions. Our parish had a range of experience and opinion and was at risk of fracturing. In response to this threat, three of our senior lay leaders and I crafted a process of consultation and discernment that has since been considered the gold-standard for parish discussion on this issue in New Zealand. While some people still chose to leave our congregation (people holding views across the spectrum on this matter), we found a consensus path forward that was able to maintain parish unity, permit welcome to all, and allow people to maintain their own personal and theological integrities. This would not have been possible without God's grace, and the good will, wisdom, and skills of others. I remain committed to collaborative processes that support consensus and allow for holding multiple integrities of genuine faith together in the Church.

In addition, there is much to learn from Indigenous leaders and from those of non-European backgrounds in our Church. There are ways of holding discussion, building consensus, and resolving conflict that are not found in *Robert's Rules of Order* or *Parliamentary Procedure*. For example, I know there have been many conversations in Edmonton (and in the Province as a whole) contemplating how the Indigenous concept of the Circle might strengthen diocesan and regional gatherings and meetings. Looking to the ways various cultures and groups have themselves answered the challenges of leadership and governance can only build and strengthen the Church.

6.3 Collaboration, Pastoral Care, and Support

The question, 'who pastors the pastors?' is one that has long filled my thoughts. I have seen the breakdown of many ministry families. I have also received unhelpful pastoral oversight, losing sleep and shedding tears as a result. Over the years, my wife and I have developed effective tools for the spiritual care and support of those involved in ministry as a necessary response to the challenges we have faced and witnessed; tools that allow the healing work of the Holy Spirit to support the care and counseling of those who are struggling.

While caring for those in ministry ensures that clergy and lay leaders are properly supported, it also keeps the vulnerable people we love and serve safe from harm. When ministers break down, they always take others with them. By 'pastoring the pastors' well, and making it a central tenet of episcopal ministry, we pastor the whole Church well, protecting the vulnerable and centralizing the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

Part of pastoring pastors well includes the opportunity for lay and ordained leaders to fruitfully collaborate in the processes and decision-making that affect our shared ministry in Jesus Christ. There must be a sharing of authority even as we share common responsibilities to generate a sense of commonality as a diocesan family.

6.4 Inspiration, Teaching, and Vision

Along with pastoral care and shared authority in ministry, being inspired to develop and learn is critical to healthy and happy ministry, a point made evident in Jesus' own teaching ministry. Central to my ministries leading the Barnabas Initiative in the Diocese of Edmonton, and as Diocesan Missioner in the Diocese of St. Andrews, was the development of training days, teaching events, and

conferences to support clergy, lay ministers, and whole congregations. I often led the teaching myself, but I was also responsible to bring in significant teachers and leaders who had special expertise. In addition, I continue to encourage one-on-one mentoring relationships, and opportunities for peer-oversight for spiritual accountability.

6.5 Justice and Advocacy

It is clear that the Diocese of Edmonton has built a strong pattern of working for justice and advocating for the marginalized. This work must continue and be developed as we seek to grow in our service of Jesus Christ and our neighbour. I have direct experience working with homeless youth, both in Edmonton, as part of the project I began at Holy Trinity (now grown to something wonderfully different and inspiring) and in Toronto. I have also worked with those struggling with some of the greatest experiences of social deprivation in the European Union in my parish work in Central Fife, Scotland. In New Zealand, I have helped found two initiatives designed to mitigate the current epidemic of youth suicidality. One is a project that provides free counseling to primary-school children and free parent coaching to their families. I have also begun the process of leading our parish in improving its ability to partner with our indigenous Māori sisters and brothers by including *Te Reo Māori* (Māori language) elements in the liturgy and growing in understanding our treaty responsibilities.

6.6 Building and Nurturing Partnerships

I was privileged to have been one of the few city clergy to be invited to take part in being a volunteer support worker at a victim support centre following the Christchurch Mosque attacks of 15 March 2019. One of the things we learned as people of many faiths came together to support the grieving and hurting Muslim community, was that the heart of inter-faith partnership was to allow each other to be authentically different. By giving permission to difference, we were able to support each other in our similarity. I remain fully committed to continuing inter-faith and ecumenical relationships in a manner which gives permission to others to be themselves, and in which I remain entirely faithful and consistent to the Anglican expression of Christianity.

C. Why do you feel called to stand for this particular Episcopal election and how have you discerned this call?

A member of Synod approached me saying that he and another person had in prayer both felt the Lord bringing my name to mind. To discern this call, my wife and I entered into a two-week period of prayer and consultation – speaking with our local bishop, our wardens, and other wise counsellors. The unanimous feeling from those others was that we should most certainly allow my name to stand. In prayer, both Cheryl and I felt a sense of joy at what might be possible, love for the people of the Diocese of Edmonton, and a desire to share with you in the ministries of Gospel and grace, building the church through mission, discipleship, and spiritual renewal. We believed that if there were people in Edmonton who felt God calling us back in this way, and people in Christchurch who felt God calling us to Edmonton in this way, and that if God was pouring out a sense of love, hope, and joy, then this was a call that needed to be tested.

for, to repent for, and to eradicate racism are equally Eurocentric. Using the same philosophies and the same assumptions that built racist systems in our church and nation cannot hope to bring healing or transformation.

How can this be addressed in the Church? While I am open to being better educated on the topic, I would propose the following steps as an option. The first obvious step is to be fully committed to the unity of all humanity in Jesus Christ, the incarnate, risen, and ascended Lord. The second is to acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit in calling all people of all cultures and languages into the one Church, and therefore assume the Holy Spirit wants the whole Church to learn from and be blessed by all cultures. The third is to be honest about ignorance and error, seeking forgiveness from those we have harmed, and from God. And the fourth is to allow the *mana*, the *okimâwapiwin* (authority, dignity) of those people and groups harmed by racist systems to take leadership in determining the path of reconciliation and healing. Only those who have been hurt can declare when healing has been completed. And fifth, be open to discovering that our best intentions and processes were wrong and need to be re-formed.

But it is easy to assent to such ideas. It is far harder to live them out. As hard as it is, though, nothing less is acceptable.

F. Other information you can share which would help us know you better.

I hold two priorities, two ways of being in the world, to be non-negotiable: I am a Jesus follower, and I am a husband (married to Cheryl for 22 years) and father to two faith-filled children (Joshua, 11, and Elsa, 7). I believe that these two priorities strengthen the effectiveness of my ministry. Devotion to Jesus Christ means that I seek to become more like him in grace and grow in the fruits and gifts of the Spirit, led by him in the battle against evil and the proclamation of the Gospel. Devotion to my family creates opportunity for my ministry to have relevance and connection with other families with young children. These two priorities strengthen me as a pastor/teacher, as a leader of worship, as a leader in mission, and as an advocate for justice.