

## **Personal Statement – Rachael Parker**

### **A Spiritual Autobiography**

Having grown up as a cradle Anglican in the dioceses of Huron and Niagara, the Church has always been a formative part of my life. At 17, being present at my grandfather's death, I began to actively seek understanding of the presence of God, which I had always known intellectually but not necessarily spiritually. What began as a farewell to the most influential person in my life, became a life-long relationship with the Divine Presence felt through the comforting and challenging influence of the Holy Spirit.

My desire to both know and experience God continued to grow, and after my undergraduate degree, I entered seminary with thoughts of pursuing lay ministry in some form. The Chapel community around me, built on a strong foundation of daily worship, birthed in me a new awareness of the relationship between the church proper and the working of the Holy Spirit in my world and in the greater world.

An experience of a personal "dark night of the soul" which lasted the entirety of Holy Week in my first year in seminary, brought me spiritually to my knees as I sought to find what seemed to be an absent God. It was only through attending Eucharist as often as possible that I could find a few moments of "not despair". After a long week, at the Chapel's Easter Vigil, when the lights came on and the bells began to ring, I knew that peace that truly passes all understanding. As I felt the light flood into my soul, I did not receive answers to all my questions, but I did know the truth that God would guide me if only I would follow. It was through that whole week of wandering that I now realize I began my journey of discernment toward ordination.

Having had the privilege to worship and serve in various capacities in 11 different churches/communities in 5 different dioceses over the past 22 years, I have come to love and appreciate the incarnation of faith that is the wideness and wholeness of the Anglican Church.

As a priest, my ministry, and my life, are dependent upon a discipline of prayer. Through prayer I seek wisdom, discernment and help from God. I believe that it is through this daily prayer that God disciplines and directs me, strengthens me, and calls me to rise from prayer to go out into the parish and the world to seek, proclaim and serve Jesus Christ with the constant presence and strength of the Holy Spirit by my side.

### **What gifts and skills do I bring to the role of Bishop in the Diocese of Edmonton?**

*Spiritual and Educational Formation:* Having served as an Examining Chaplain and as a Parish Internship Supervisor in two dioceses, I have a keen desire to facilitate opportunities for those ordained and seeking ordination to discover ways to continue both discernment and learning, within the contexts and resources the Diocese has to share.

The need to encourage and support lay ministers through local clergy and diocesan resources is of the utmost importance as the church requires ministers (lay and ordained) who are able to read and respond to the particular needs of their own communities. Ongoing training and facilitating conversations for leaders at the grass roots levels will provide for meeting local needs. I foresee the role of the Canon Pastor for Rural Ministries, the varied Archdiaconal areas of expertise, and the Deaneries as access points for these ongoing interactions.

*Administration and Leadership:* The bishop in this Diocese cannot undertake the ministry they are called to if they are unwilling to recognize and seek out the gifts of others and work collaboratively. A bishop must be willing to both delegate as appropriate, and ask for expertise

and assistance. I can certainly do both! We are in a period of flux in which the Church must acknowledge changes in how and what church looks like. While that can be exciting, it can also be difficult. I have experience in both participating in the creation of a new form of parish ministry and in completing a parish's ministry. This work requires both a prayerful and determined mind and a compassionate and giving heart. Again, I can certainly offer both.

*Collaboration, Pastoral Care, and Support:* Due to personal relationships – familial and friendships – I cannot overstate the need for the Church to continue to build up our communal understanding and need for love of *all* of God's children: Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, the homeless, those who live by choice or circumstance on the fringes of society. As Christians we *must* work toward seeing Christ in all others. However, this "seeing" has to begin at home. Our clergy and families, our lay leaders and volunteers need to be supported that they might be strengthened *to* support.

*Inspiration, Teaching, Vision:* It has been my experience that working with colleagues and laity in a team setting is a naturally inviting and receptive place to witness the Holy Spirit at work. As bishop, I would be energised by the opportunities to meet with parishes, lay ministers, deacons, and priests to develop relationships through which we could discern, share, and teach others of God's vision for the Church. Whether it is in 2's, 12's or 70, we do God's ministry together.

*Justice and Advocacy:* One of the gifts of being a Christian is the privilege of knowing you were made in God's image and God loves you. This privilege is extended to *all of humanity*.

As the Church, as the presence of Jesus in the world, we have the responsibility to work with others to share that truth with people who have been marginalized, traumatized, silenced, or simply forgotten. We must work with other groups – faith and secular – across our Diocese – city and rural – to find those who are lost. We must speak *with* them until they find their voices are being heard. If we are to be the church at its best, we can do no less.

*Building and Nurturing Partnerships:* The bishop of a diocese has the unique opportunity to grow and enhance relationships with individuals and groups that facilitate improvements in society, fostering greater understanding of worldviews and creating opportunities to share what is best about the Church with the world. Ecumenical, Inter-Faith and Community Partnerships, when fostered with an open and Christ-like heart bring hope and peace to all involved. The bishop needs to lead by example. The churches need to seek out local opportunities to do the same.

### **Why do I feel called to stand for this particular Episcopal Election and how have I discerned this call?**

Over the past several years, I have often contemplated whether I may someday be called to serve in an episcopal role. Due to the nature of my husband's work (Chaplain in the Armed Forces), this pondering always seemed to be a purely hypothetical pursuit. However, due to the opportunities the Diocesan geography holds for military ministry and the number of years my husband has until mandatory retirement, his posting to Wainwright allowed for this pondering to become more realistic.

At the point when I came to my churches in Wainwright and Edgerton, I had not given any thought to testing this call. However, through Lent and after many conversations with my husband and with other people with whom I have served over the years, I began to feel the need to seriously

consider who I am as priest, how God has invited me to serve over the past 22 years, and where I may be called to serve in the future.

The discernment process which has led me to this point has followed a similar pattern to other times of discerning which led toward ordination, parishes, and other major life decisions. On Ash Wednesday of this year my husband gently asked me if I had given any thought to pursuing the opportunity of candidacy for a nomination. We discussed the ramifications for his career and our future. I then sat quietly with the question “am I being called to test the call to serve as a bishop.” After much prayer and meditation, journaling, searching scripture and Christian reading, I asked my husband to begin openly discerning alongside me. Unbeknownst to me, a good, faithful, and prayerful friend was also discerning and asked me if I was considering this as well. I have reached out quietly to other people whose opinion I value and who I trust will speak honestly to me.

While I do not yet know if I am called by God to be a bishop in the Church, I do know that this process of discernment and the act of even asking the question out loud, “do I feel so called” has been a humbling, life changing and transformative exercise for me. I believe this process is making of me a better priest.

I may not know at this time if I am called by God to be a bishop, or indeed may be called to something else, but I do know that if I am so called, I will walk gently and humbly, led by the Holy Spirit, as we all enter this new ministry together. I could only ever serve as bishop if I had the collaboration and support of the clergy and laity walking alongside me.

If indeed I am not called to be the 11th Bishop of Edmonton, I will serve with loyalty, integrity, and pleasure whomever God does call.

### **In what ways am I committed to a culture of inclusion and diversity within the Diocese of Edmonton?**

As a new person within the Diocese, I am impressed with the sense of inclusivity and diversity which seems to be already woven into the fabric of the Church community. Present within the Order of Clergy there seems to be a good balance of youth and experience, men, and women. In the ministries of the Diocese, there is a concerted effort made to facilitate opportunities for both urban and rural parishes. Good work is being done in the Indigenous Ministries Initiative as well.

While I have both a personal connection and a keen interest in the continuing work of reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters, my experience in this area is lacking. As Bishop I would look forward to meeting with and listening to the stories of the people of Frog Lake First Nation. I would also wish to support the parallel work being done within the urban Indigenous communities. The connections between stories of those who are living on First Nations lands within the Diocese and those who are urban dwellers need to be recognized and honoured.

I believe that it is in listening, without judgement, to another’s truth that we are best able to develop relationships that can then lead us forward together into the future God would dream for us all.

It is my understanding that good work has been done under Bishop Jane’s care to create an atmosphere of inclusivity for members of our LGBTQ2S+ family. Through ongoing dialogue and participation in liturgies and educational training, I would work with our clergy and laity to educate other members of our congregations about the fullness of God’s creation as experienced by people some still think of as “other”.

I believe that as a Church we are called to first see the profound love of Christ in the person before us rather than what makes the one before us “other” or different. When we can acknowledge the sharing of Christ in one another, then we will be blessed to recognize that what is different *before* us complements and makes whole that which is different *in us*. It is in the coming together of all of God’s children that we complete the creation God said was “good”.

### **What have I learned about systemic racism and how we can address it in the church?**

In my time in Halifax, a community struggling with systemic racism, I learned how deeply ingrained racism can be and how difficult it is for people, particularly in the church, to even acknowledge it, let alone begin to address it. Within the Church we must begin to make opportunities for learning, listening to those who have experienced oppression, and hold intentional conversations, which can encourage dialogue and change.

The political situation of the past few years, combined with the pandemic, have created a new world in which truth is being spoken and challenges are being offered. The Church has been before, and must be now, a forum through which both speaking truth to power and proclaiming Jesus’ truth of inclusive love for all God’s children are carried on hand in hand. Both these actions must be made in the world and in the local parish.

### **Other Information**

In 22 years of ordained ministry, I have had the privilege of serving as Rector of parishes in 3 dioceses and volunteering in 2 others. I have served in single and multi-point parishes, urban and rural. While none of my churches have had many children or youth, working with our younger generations has always been a passion of mine. For the first 4 years of my ministry, I was involved with the creation and annual running of Ask & Imagine, which was a 2-week residential programme for Anglican and Lutheran youth to experience leadership and learning in a theological setting. As bishop, I would look forward to opportunities to once again interact and work with our young people.

One of the gifts of having moved around significantly thus far in my ministry, is that of having worked &/or volunteered in 4 other dioceses in the Canadian Church before coming to Edmonton. I have experienced varying styles of administrative structure. I have attended gatherings, Synods, participated on Diocesan Councils and witnessed the Spirit working in and through different geographies of our national Church. I believe this allows me to bring a different perspective to this diocese.

I would also like to note that as part of my discernment of testing this call, my husband and I have had significant prayer and conversation about the possible impact it would have on his career and our family life. Should God call me to be bishop in this diocese, Rob and I have discussed possibilities for him that would ensure I would be able to be fully present for my ministry in the diocese.

As he has said, I have made sacrifices for his vocation in the past. If God so calls, Rob is willing to make sacrifices for me.

I sincerely believe that should God be calling me to this new chapter in my ministry, God will also walk with us to ensure I am able to fully serve.

One final note: if you would like to get to know more about me and how I think, feel free to take a look at my YouTube page: The Reverend Rachael Parker.

Thank you. God bless you.