

## 1) A Spiritual Autobiography

My introduction to the Christian faith was when, aged 9, I was transferred to the local Church of England primary school, only a few minutes' walk from the family home. My class teacher was a bi-vocational assistant priest in the parish church, and the lunchtime supervisor was a Lay Reader. Invited to become an Altar Server, little did I know where it would lead!

My embryonic faith was nurtured in that school and church, both of which were in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, and I was attracted by the drama of the liturgy, the tangible presence of God, and sense of community.

During my gap year before beginning university I was drawn to a youth group in a neighbouring parish, and began discerning whether God might be calling me to ministry. I received guidance in my prayer life and began the practice of praying the Daily Office, which has rooted me in a life of prayer ever since. We journeyed on pilgrimage to the Shrines of Our Lady of Walsingham and Lourdes, furthering a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in my faith and practice.

Upon beginning my degree in Cybernetics and Computer Science I spent some time away from Anglicanism, becoming involved in the Methodist Society at University and worshipping at an independent evangelical church, both of which increased my experience of the wider church and gave me an appreciation of relationships between different Christian bodies.

After graduating I returned to the Anglican Church and, working as an IT Consultant in many schools, tried to ignore the ever-growing suggestion that maybe God might be calling me to be a priest. Back in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, I also became involved in local "Rock Masses", blending the sacramental tradition with charismatic worship, something which has continued to be important. Eventually, only a month before marrying Natalie, I attended a Selection Conference and it was recommended that I train for ordination.

We made the decision to accept an offer from Ripon College Cuddesdon, just outside Oxford, partly because of the breadth of theological traditions represented amongst the student body, recognising my need to be fully immersed in the Anglican tradition rather than just one part of it. While at Cuddesdon we had the opportunity to spend time on exchange at the College of the Transfiguration in South Africa, which opened my eyes to the vitality of the Anglican Communion beyond the Church of England, time which has been so formative in my ministry.

After South Africa we were so much more open to the possibilities God might have in store for future ministry, and so embraced the opportunity to begin ordained ministry in the Diocese of Truro, the most south-westerly part of the Church of England, ministering in three parishes combining Anglo-Catholic and Broad Church traditions across a variety of urban and rural settings.

Since beginning to discern a vocation to ordained ministry I have been interested in the Benedictine tradition of hospitality, and am an Oblate of Alton Abbey, Hampshire, UK. "Rock Masses" and, indeed, youth pilgrimages at Walsingham, introduced me to sacramental worship with an openness to the Holy Spirit, which I have continued to explore throughout my ministry.

I have always enjoyed working ecumenically, engaging across denominations including an ecumenical Easter Fun Day in Guernsey, seeking to work together building God's Kingdom and showing God's love for all people. Ministering in North Holmwood we began regular shared worship between St John's and a local Elim Pentecostal church, bringing two very different worship styles together as we sought to worship God and reach out to the community. Likewise in Guernsey there is regular worship shared between Vale Church and our sisters and brothers in the Salvation Army and Methodist Churches.

I am comfortable across the breadth of the Anglican tradition, but at the heart of my spirituality is the Anglo-Catholic tradition, where I am nurtured as a priest of the Sodality of Mary ([sodalityofmary.co.uk](http://sodalityofmary.co.uk)), an international association of Anglican priests.

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

The model of bishop as shepherd seems, in many ways, to be intrinsically linked to that of a watchperson or lookout since the nurturing and guiding is surely closely related to looking further afield for both threats and opportunities. Or, to consider both the immediate and the "bigger picture".

My ordained ministry to date has been across contexts ranging from rural to urban, in addition to the complexities of ministering on an island with sometimes unreliable transport links. This has led to consideration of how to be connected to the wider diocese (and, indeed, the wider church) in a context of relative isolation.

In my previous parish I was blessed to nurture several vocations as occasional preachers, worship leaders, and priests; and, alongside my wife Natalie training as a Lay Reader during this pandemic, have come to appreciate the varied ways and contexts in which training for ministry can occur. Additionally, I came to understand the potential for selection and training of Ordained Local Ministers – priests called out of their parish to serve that same parish as assistant priests, with the parish's involvement in their training. With the challenges of ministry in the Diocese of Edmonton, I wonder whether that is something which might be considered.

I was fortunate to inherit a Lay Reader and honorary assistant priest, and this ministry team grew to include a Pastoral Assistant, four occasional preachers and two worship leaders who went on to train for ordination. In this way I was supervising and nurturing a growing team during my 7 years in that parish. Additionally, a fundraising project for a new community building led to working with a variety of people using their skills and abilities in fundraising and project management.

My background before ordination was in computing, which has been a keen interest for most of my life. Since ordination I have been fascinated in exploring how new technology might be utilised to grow the Church. While training for ordination I was involved with i-church, an international internet-based fresh-expression of church sponsored by the Diocese of Oxford. In recent years I have been exploring how technology such as podcasts and live-streaming can make the church accessible to those unable to attend in person – something which has been invaluable during this time of pandemic but which must continue to develop as we move forward. Technology can bring new possibilities for the Church.

For a time I was Rector of the Society of Catholic Priests, Guildford branch. My primary concern was to reach out to support and nurture clergy who were struggling in any way, including isolation. This was further emphasised in my desire to fully involve retired priests in the life of my churches. As a member of the Sodality of Mary I am committed to mutual support and nurture of clergy – and during this pandemic this support has grown immeasurably online all around the world.

In times of conflict or misunderstanding my approach is to come alongside others, getting to know them face to face (when the pandemic allows), and putting aside any preconceptions in order to understand each other's positions better and seek a way forward. It is not easy, it is not fast, but it can be done if we can build up trust. Maybe a weakness of mine which I am aware and have sought to address is a tendency to empathise too closely with particular people and situations.

As a school governor for 7 years in Dorking, I journeyed with a struggling school until it became one of the best in county.

As a church, and as society in general, we are in a difficult position. Trying to recover from the effects of the pandemic, balancing environmental concerns against economic matters, let alone church worries of falling numbers and related finances. But there is the opportunity to look at things afresh, and see what new life and new possibilities God might be bringing in as we try to live the Five Marks of Mission and go Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, and Treasure all of creation.

### **3) Why do you feel called to stand for this particular Episcopal election and how have you discerned this call?**

If someone had suggested at the beginning of 2021 that I would be considering having my name put forward for nomination as a bishop I would not have believed them, it is something I had truly never considered. But, during February I experienced a vivid dream about episcopacy followed closely by a priest of the Sodality of Mary mentioning this vacancy and suggesting anyone feeling called to episcopacy should prayerfully consider whether they would be willing to have their name put forward. These two things so close together started me wondering.

A few years ago I had explored the possibility of ministry in Canada, but at that point the timing wasn't right even though the idea was very appealing and exciting. So I wondered quite what this might mean. The remainder of Lent was spent praying for guidance, and trying to listen for God; exploring with my wife, my spiritual director, and a trusted friend, whether it might be possible that God could be calling me to this ministry. But, no matter how much I tried to get away from the idea, I wasn't able to. And as time went by that feeling of calling grew stronger.

Feelings of anticipation, excitement, and trepidation abounded as I awaited the release of the Diocesan Profile. Upon reading it I felt overwhelmed, but upon reflecting and praying the feeling of calling continued to grow. I had never experienced a general call to episcopacy, but I have felt a strong call to explore whether or not God might be calling me to this particular expression of episcopacy as Bishop of Edmonton, and whether my particular skills and experiences might be what is needed as chief shepherd of the diocese in this season.

#### **4) In what ways are you committed to a culture of inclusion and diversity within the Diocese of Edmonton? Illustrate with examples.**

I began my Christian journey in churches against the ordination of women as priests. As I grew in my faith I came to embrace the ordination of women to all orders of ministry, even when that has adversely affected my relationship with those who do not have the same theological position.

I am a member of Inclusive Church ([inclusive-church.org](http://inclusive-church.org)) which works for full inclusion in the church; and the Sodality of Mary, the clergy association of which I am a part, affirms that God calls people to the Sacred Ministry regardless of ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

Throughout my ministry I have supported, encouraged, and nurtured those in the LGBTQ community, and worked hard in the church for not just inclusion but celebration of the diversity.

While serving in the Diocese of Truro I was blessed to serve as governor in a school for children with special educational needs, and a focus was to ensure that each young person achieved their full potential and was treated with dignity at all times.

My previous parish had a varied socio-economic situation across its urban and rural components, and I endeavoured to ensure the Vestry and Church Wardens shared that same mix taken out where possible to make it as representative as possible.

If we are truly inclusive, there is a challenge of accepting those who, through their interpretation of Christian teaching, believe differently, especially in issues of sexuality. We must work alongside, and minister with, those who hold diverse opinions.

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

St Vincent de Paul said: *"We must love our neighbour as being made in the image of God and as an object of his love."*

My time on exchange in South Africa was formational in so many ways, but something which stays with me to this day was when one day I walked into my favourite fast food restaurant and was surprised to see a white person behind the counter. Suddenly I gained a clear picture of systemic racism, and the expectations of what jobs are assumed based on skin colour.

Growing up in the UK, the racially-motivated murder of Stephen Lawrence, a black teenager, in 1993 was a big wakeup call for so many inside and outside the church. But racism has continued. The "Windrush" scandal, whereby Commonwealth immigrants were wrongly detained, denied legal support, and threatened with deportation, has also rightly been highlighted in recent years. It feels as if we never learn.

The Church of England, where I have served since ordination, has written reports about racism for the past 40 years, the latest, "From Lament to Action" was released earlier in 2021. But a key reflection is that many recommendations of previous reports were never followed through and, as far as senior appointments in the church are concerned, the majority are still white.

There are so many things which could, and should, be done in the church, but some of the key ones are:

- Ensure non-indigenous and indigenous involvement in all appointments and leadership groups
- Provide education on racial justice including in parishes, in the diocese, and in theological education
- Provide settings in which indigenous and non-indigenous Christians can learn from, and listen to, each other.
- Build a culture of trust between non-indigenous and indigenous Anglicans
- Work with young people, to embed a culture of inclusivity from a young age

None of this is rocket science, but we need to get together and break down barriers as we seek to be God's people here and now. We cannot just bury our heads in the sand and tell ourselves that the problem can be solved by the next generation. As Martin Luther King said, *"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there "is" such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."*

## **6) Other information you can share which would help us know you better.**

I am married to Natalie, a fellow Reading Football Club fan whom I met at a match, and we have one daughter, Bridget. I have been a musician in rock bands, and am a self-confessed tech geek, all of which help me to de-stress.

Since February I have prayed frequently for the Diocese of Edmonton and the process to discover who God calls to be your next bishop – whether that is me, or whether it is someone else. Thank you for considering me as a potential candidate, and I pray that God will lead you to discover the person who has already been called to be your next bishop.