

Spiritual Autobiography

I was born and raised in downtown Toronto to Maria and Ildeberto Camara, devout Roman Catholic immigrant parents of Portuguese/Açorean descent. Our home was the gathering place of the family, welcoming family members – grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins – who first arrived in Toronto to make Canada home, and lived with us before they established themselves in the community and moved beyond our neighbourhood. Growing up in my early years with cousins in the house, I was blessed with a younger brother, Daniel, when I was nine and our family household was complete with maternal grandparents, parents and brother. Family has always been an important and coalescing factor of life in my formation – big family gatherings and celebrations.

I moved to Montreal in 1995, at the age of 19, to study political science at McGill University and decided to make Montreal home. The spirituality, family values, community and cultural life of my childhood was something that I value and which I worked hard to recreate and establish in my new home when I moved to Montreal.

The exercising of my faith in community is also a very important part of my life and was something that I found difficult to establish in my early years in Montreal. As I began to worship and study in my new community, I found myself spiritually adrift within the Roman Catholic tradition and eventually stopped attending the church I had found in Montreal – questions of theology and ecclesiology challenging some of my previous understanding of church and community. Still, my thirst and hunger for practicing my faith and worshipping in community never subsided and I explored faith communities in Montreal to find a place where I felt at home, where Word and Sacrament were important and study, questioning and learning were encouraged and where all of God's people were welcomed to the table and where a diversity of members were raised as leaders. I eventually found myself a regular attendee at the Anglican Cathedral and it wasn't long before I was again actively involved in the life of the Church, surrounded by community, worshipping, studying, being challenged and growing in the Spirit. It was this Anglican community that nurtured and supported me spiritually as I wrestled with questions of identity and calling. At the Easter Vigil service of 1998 I was received as a member into the Anglican Communion.

It was in these first few years in Montreal that I began to feel, again, a call to ordained ministry. As a teen and young adult, I had been very active in the Church and had wondered if God was calling me to ordained ministry. I dismissed that nudge and decided to study politics. But God's call on my life continued to nudge me to consider what else God might have been calling me to. I have always been politically and socially active – seeking justice and equality among all of God's people – promoting greater access to a social welfare system that ensured its people access to universal medical care, quality education, basic income and the necessities of life. I was blessed in 1998 to have the opportunity to travel to our partner diocese in South-West Brazil. The witness of the small Anglican community in that Diocese to the Gospel, and the drive of that community to social justice awoke in me a passion which continues to feed me today. But it was also that experience which confirmed God's call for me to lead in God's mission back home. I was humbled and blessed to be able to return back to the Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil as a theological intern and to work and witness with the Anglican community in the Diocese of the Amazon where I saw the Spirit moving and giving life to many!

CAMARA, Robert - Personal Statement

As I continued to pray and discern God's call I considered if God was calling me to monastic life as an active member of a religious community – but it was during this time that God brought into my a life a man who I later married and on whom the Holy Spirit has poured out an abundance of God's blessings. Gabriele has been a source of love, care, challenge and spiritual growth as we have over nineteen years built a home and life rooted in the love of Christ, so that we may also be an example to the people we serve.

As an associate member of the Fellowship of St. John, I continue to draw on the wisdom and spiritual support of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, a monastic community in Cambridge, Massachusetts. My own spiritual journey was enriched by their hospitality and welcome among them as I lived and prayed with them while doing my clinical pastoral education.

Throughout the last 10 years of ordained ministry, I have been led by the Spirit and challenged by God to further God's mission and advance the Kingdom of God. It has been a humbling journey, so far, as it certainly has unfolded with great joy and hope, some pain and hurt, much faith, some challenges and rooted in love. I have had the great joy and honour to accompany many people on their faith journey, sharing my experience and encouraging their own. Parish ministry has been for me, a life-giving opportunity to lead, teach, listen and encourage the people of God in growing into relationship with Christ. It has also been life-giving because it has encouraged, taught and supported my own relationship with Christ – being able to receive from the communities that I have served as I also lead them.

Four years ago, I discerned God calling me to a more active diocesan leadership when Bishop Mary Irwin Gibson asked me to take on the role of Executive Archdeacon and Vicar General of the Diocese of Montreal. These recent years have allowed me to grow into a more active listening of where God is calling the church, particularly in this Diocese – strategic planning, sharing of limited resources, providing learning opportunities, encouraging lay and clergy people to find their place in the leadership of the diocese, gathering together diverse voices to help the bishop address difficult and challenging issues, and supporting the diocese to grow as we pray for renewal and revival. On the national church level, it has been very life giving and spiritually encouraging to work with Executive Archdeacons and Executive Officers from the other 29 dioceses in the Anglican Church of Canada. Much support, encouragement, prayer and wisdom has been received and shared from working together to find ways of facing common challenges and discerning creative ways to follow where the Spirit is leading us.

In the last year, I have had some people ask me if I feel called to the office of a Bishop, and I have resisted the thought. But I am also a strong believer that if God is calling someone to a particular role of leadership in the church that requires discernment by the Church, that it is important to allow the Holy Spirit to work in making that call clear. And now I find myself, along with the synod of the Diocese of Edmonton, discerning what God might be calling me to as I seek to serve Jesus in God's mission. The call to teach, sanctify and govern in Jesus' Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20) is one that I have heard and say, "Here I am, Lord." I was also reminded in John's Gospel (15:16) that "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit." Wherever it is that God may be calling me, may I humbly go and may our shared ministry bear fruit for the glory of God. I pray God's blessings on the members of the Synod of the Diocese of Edmonton as they prayerfully discern whom to call as their next bishop and shepherd, walking among them and leading them closer to the Kingdom of God.

Gifts and Skills

As a candidate for bishop, I believe that I bring a number of gifts and skills to the role of Bishop in the Diocese of Edmonton. I am a quiet and still presence, grounded in my faith in Jesus Christ and nurtured by regular prayer of the offices and scripture. I believe the Holy Scriptures to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to salvation. I also believe that the Holy Spirit continues to illuminate, reveal and speak to the church and that the Holy Spirit continues to lead us in understanding Scripture in our context – time and place – in the formation of disciples and in building up the Kingdom. As a parish priest and the Executive Archdeacon of a diocese, I bring gifts and skills in diocesan administration, diplomacy, experience of work and leadership within the diocese, ecclesiastical province and national church structures. I am committed to working with lay and ordained leadership to support and encourage the diversity of ministry that exists within the diocese of Edmonton, providing pastoral support and leadership to the many smaller rural parishes and communities which are an integral and important part of the fabric of the diocese. I recognize the need for and actively seek others to support and collaborate with gifts and wisdom which I may not possess. I am forthcoming with what I believe in and think, and am driven by my beliefs, but I am able to listen to criticism and receive direction and adapt. I work hard to support colleagues and lay leadership, providing pastoral support and encouragement, praying with them as they discern God's call in their own lives. I believe that we are life-long learners and encourage opportunities to teach and learn so that our faith may continue to grow and that the Spirit may continue to challenge us to better understand what God is speaking to us. I bring a passion for social justice, seeking to right our relationship with God by speaking out against injustice and giving voice to those on the margins – addressing the societal injustices of poverty, racism, gender inequality and striving for a right relationship with indigenous peoples. I believe and advocate for greater ecumenism – seeking to heal historical wounds but sensitive to the history and reality of today's challenges. I believe I also bring the gift of being a wounded healer – being one on the margins who the church has encouraged, supported and brought up in leadership. Finally, I bring the gift of humility – that nothing can be done without the grace and will of God – praying continuously that we may find ways to share the Gospel and bring people to the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.

Edmonton's Episcopal Election

The decision to allow my name to stand for bishop came after much prayer and discernment – having been asked to allow my name to stand by a member of the Synod of Edmonton and being encouraged by my peers to allow the Holy Spirit to decide through our synodic process. I believe that the Diocese of Edmonton will elect a strong, loving, passionate and faithful person to lead the diocese as their next bishop – and it is through prayer and discernment that the church can make the decision of who they believe God is calling them to elect. I believe that I have God-given gifts that can benefit the church and, specifically the Diocese of Edmonton, to help lead the church in proclaiming the Good News and to continue the work of building the Kingdom in this part of the globe at this junction in history. And just as the eleven sought to fill the role of overseer, and they nominated two amongst them, whereby the lot fell on Matthias (Acts 1:21-26), I pray God's mercy that by allowing my name to stand, the synod might be able to discern who among them might best fit the current needs of the church in Edmonton. I bring a willingness to lead, to listen, to share, to love, to teach, to learn and to proclaim with you – if it be the will of God and the desire of the synod – than let it be so.

Inclusion & Diversity

I am committed to a culture of inclusion and diversity within the Diocese of Edmonton, working with lay and clergy leadership to ensure that all of our parishes are welcoming, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, physical ability and socio-economic differences. I am committed to working with lay and ordained leadership to identify, encourage and support an inclusive and diverse leadership in the diocese – so that the Diocese of Edmonton’s leadership, lay and ordained, both parochial and regional, may be a mirror of the diversity that exists in the diocese. I am committed to continued education which allows us to better understand our call to inclusivity and the gifts of diversity – so that we may continue to understand our shortfalls and strive for greater inclusion and a more diverse church that includes all of God’s children.

Systemic Racism

I have learned that systemic racism is something that is inherent – long existing from times where acts of racism were supported and institutionalized. While as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to speak out against racism and to root out this evil – it is essential that we recognize that systemic racism exists in our society, including in our church. I believe that by recognizing the existence of the evil of systemic racism we can authentically address the issue of racism and begin to remove barriers that may promote continued racism. By examining, studying, praying and addressing concerns, barriers, actions, and beliefs, we can change systems, alter patterns and support one another in allowing all of God’s people the opportunity to access and enjoy the Kingdom – free from bias, envy and hate. I believe, at this pivotal moment in our history, that we are all being asked to take on the work of education, increased awareness and repentance of sub-conscious and conscious attitudes and behaviours that undermine racial justice and equity in our society. By doing so, we are working towards experiencing John’s revelation of a great multiracial gathering worshiping the lamb (Rev 7:9-10). I am committed to walk alongside members of the Diocese while continuing to empower, learn and grow in the Spirit of reconciliation and justice for all.