

## **The Very Rev. Daniel P. Richards**

### **1. Please share a vocational and spiritual experience that has influenced your call to enter the process to be the Ninth Bishop of Upper South Carolina.**

Durham Cathedral was not on the itinerary we had planned for the drive from Norwich and the Moors in eastern England to Edinburgh, Scotland. My family had left it out of the itinerary to shorten a long day of driving on my sabbatical as we toured around the United Kingdom looking at how monasticism affected the tradition, but road construction changed our plans. It felt like the Spirit was answering a prayer I had not been aware of praying as we were detoured right into Durham.

Cuthbert is buried at Durham, and Cuthbert embodies something basic about being a man of God that I admire. He was given a horse as a bishop, but he refused to ride up to any person while riding it. He would get off and walk to approach each person humbly as an equal. It is what allowed him to spread God's kingdom throughout Northumbria. He always knew himself first as a human being. (And he gave us the first recorded sighting of the Loch Ness Monster.) I admire Cuthbert first and foremost for his profound ability to embody the Reign of God in such a way that thousands were led to Christ through his humility.

Cuthbert's tomb has been a place of pilgrimage in Durham for bishops for centuries, but I did not know that as I stood there and Amy led our children out so I could be alone. My wife had asked me earlier in the car whether I was called to be a bishop, and I had said no. We are supposed to say no when we are priests. Then looking down at the great stone slab marked with only his name, I was profoundly moved. I knelt alone and found myself praying about my calling in the church. Later I learned that bishops-to-be would go as pilgrims to pray at that same spot. That was my first moment of clarity.

That day I began to ask myself what it meant to be a bishop, and what I might bring to the office that could be used by God. That was seven years ago this coming May. I have been working on that question since that day.

The second moment of clarity came as a dean a year later. After a funeral I stood on a porch off the parish hall navigating leadership issues with a local deacon, and I realized how much I love being in ministry with my colleagues and how much I loved serving them through leadership.

We are the body of Christ serving the body of Christ, and I have found that I have gifts to lead and tend to my colleagues even as we have difficult conversations and search for sometimes elusive common ground. I love empowering leaders to lead and servants to serve as we all follow Christ together.

Those two moments are just two of the moments of clarity along the path to discernment of God's call to be bishop and to your Diocese. I love Christ's church, and I have seen it lead well and have lain awake at night praying to understand what God could possibly be doing.

I was not sure at first why this call until I read your profile and your survey results. The responses of clergy and people longing for an even stronger relationship with the bishop and

diocese spoke to me. The call to have a bishop who puts Christ first and wants to be out and about in the diocese reminded me of those moments on porches and in counsel together where holy friendship can navigate better than administration.

I want to walk with a Diocese, as a human being, a man of God, a husband and father, layman, deacon, priest, and if it is God's will, a bishop. I love what I see in your profile: resilient rural churches, diverse communities, creative urban ministries, historic communities of color and new ventures and directions in ministry, all centered in a singular identity as the people of God.

As a bishop, the horse may be necessary to get out around the Diocese, but it is in walking together, eating together, worshiping together that we are the body of Christ.

**2. Based on your reading of our Diocesan Profile, what are your first impressions of our diocese? What excites you most about leading the Diocese of Upper South Carolina? Which of your gifts and skills do you see as most relevant to the opportunities and challenges facing this diocese? How might these gifts/skills help with potential growing edges for EDUSC?**

Our hope in Christ as a people of God in a divided church and culture is embodied in our hospitality. If we can welcome each other as Christ and can stay together, we can serve as a sign of grace to the world. My current parish is a parish that stayed when a group left to found a new church years before I arrived. It was ugly and painful, but the witness of staying together, moving past bitterness, and then welcoming home the people who left has brought many members back over the years and brought in children who had left the faith altogether because of the divisions they had witnessed. The Diocese of Upper South Carolina deciding to stay together and in the Episcopal church is exciting, even as it must be challenging in days of division like ours.

I am excited to read that you have broad theological diversity and love each other. The Episcopal church needs to be a whole church. We need traditional teaching, faith, and practice even as we reach out to our neighbors in ways that stretch us. We need to pass on the faith that was given to us, and we need to be willing to pass it on to anyone who will follow Jesus.

The church can be bold and faithful in our love of others when we are rooted in the Bible, the sacraments, and strong community ties. In both the survey responses and the profile the people and clergy of the Diocese wrote of a desire to have a Bishop with a strong faith rooted in Christ. I am excited to lead a diocese that is hungry to know God more and to follow Christ more than any agenda.

Your Diocese has so much to be excited about: from small churches finding new ways to stay in the game to great corporate churches finding creative ways to engage the culture and all of us figuring out how to turn this season of pandemic and politics into a new harvest of opportunity. The historic institutions and work to preserve them while building for the future offer deep and wide foundations on which to support ancient ministries while building new communities.

My successes have been in deepening communities of faith that are centered in Christ and reaching out in love to their communities. I have formed leaders and empowered people to lead in places beyond my own strength. I like to build relationships and community through worship and prayer, teaching, and open and clear systems that allow for ministries to minister and ministers to love people in the way of Jesus. I am calm in a crisis and bring clarity to discernment in difficult times.

I like getting people to the table when there are differences and working through those differences to find common ground wherever possible. Saint Paul said, "As much as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone." My greatest strengths are in faithfulness to a vision, leading systems to greater health and strength, and being present and calm during crises. That work is evident in my vocational work as a priest, dean, and recently as a chaplain to the Phoenix Fire Department.

As a parent and former youth and young adult minister, I am also excited about the integration and success of the generational outreach of various ministries based in camps and a host of retreat settings. Having worked around the church, it is exciting to see Cursillo, Encounter, Daughters of the King, Communities of Hope, and so many ministries active in the Diocese of Upper South Carolina. I have had experiences with all of these over the years and am gratified to see so them at work.

The structure of the Diocese appears set up to support these ministries and make sure that the work of is focused on active areas of health. That is vital and heartening.

**3. The demands of being a spiritual leader are tough, but at the end of the day, you, like us, are a human being saved solely by the grace of God. How will you share your own humanity with us and how will you continue to walk alongside all of us while being our Bishop?**

Being the Bishop can be a weighty job for good reasons. Serving currently as president of the disciplinary board, it is obvious how heavy the care of the Diocese can be. But Christ promised that his burden was easy and his yoke was light.

To balance the weight that is necessary to the responsibility while seeking the light and ease of Christ, it is helpful for the Bishop to follow Christ with the people, to get in line behind the apostles, and walk alongside. Currently, I lead Morning Prayer on Facebook, a practice that began during the pandemic shutdown as a way to increase the time with members of the parish. We have all had to learn new ways to communicate and move the contact with ministry beyond the limitations of lockdown. It may not have been fun initially, but we have familiarity with tools throughout the church that were limited before. As Bishop, it is now possible to be directly available in ways that were not widely available before.

I would continue to offer regular online worship for the Diocese if I were bishop as well as more regular meetings with the clergy. In the ancient church, the bishop met with the priests and deacons before sunrise for Eucharist together, and they took portions of the host from the bishop's table to their own communities to be mingled with the offering, making real the unity of the diocese.

That physical unity may not be possible with the size of our dioceses today, but the spiritual unity of regular prayer, study, and counsel together is easily available with travel during more normal times and through electronic communication forms today. It may be that we need both for a long time to come, but the community that we can form now online is much deeper and richer than it ever has been before. Through Zoom and other programs, we can be "in the room" together even when we are miles apart. This is an exciting time for Dioceses to reimagine unity and community where distance and expense have kept many apart.

Bishops are often involved only when things are not going well or when some political message needs to be delivered. Those times will always be a part of the role of the bishop. But just like in parenting, they should be a small percentage of the total communication. That is balance is possible when the amount of communication is increased around life that is not difficult or political. When we have worshiped and fellowshiped enough, we can handle almost anything and stay together.

I am deeply Benedictine in my spirituality. I have been shaped by regular prayer and worship, retreats at monasteries, and hours hiking, running, and camping in the wilderness. That all sounds quiet and removed from life because it is. But I am also a connoisseur of coffee and tea, and I love sharing these and good meals with friends and colleagues.

The bishop who influenced my image of what it means to be a diocesan the most was Robert Gepert of Western Michigan. He traveled to each deanery ten months a year to pray together, read the upcoming week's readings and discuss them, and share news and seek counsel from the clergy. He made real the meaning of being a college of presbyters. I would add deacons to that table, given my own experience of the wisdom of deacons. But my own ministry would be deeply shaped by that experience of shared ministry. As his dean, I was counseled and watched him make decisions that took what we could give and what only he could know into deeper discernment of God's will.

Life as a bishop must be grounded in God and lived in the Dioceses. I would continue to do both with God's help, and a good spiritual director, staff, college, and of course my wife and family.

#### **4. How might your ministry of presence to the whole diocese be manifest in addition to visitations?**

The bishop and chief pastor is an overseer and a shepherd. Overseers must be objective enough to have a clear view and close enough to still see. Shepherds live with sheep and each other. They do not send flocks out, they lead them out. These two roles have to find a balance in each bishop.

During the pandemic, we have all been forced to engage in media in ways we have not imagined. Daily prayer through Facebook and Zoom have allowed us to grow our community during a time when we feared loss. These tools have been available for years, but they have only recently become affordable and familiar.

Bishops have, in my experience, often missed the power of the fireside chat over the radio. I would use regular worship as a means to connect to the diocese, but that communication has to be met face to face. There is no replacement for parish visitation. It is important for the bishop to be at coffee hour and have time with the people at Diocesan events and summer camps. This ministry of presence is essential. Some of my fondest memories of my bishops have been standing around at clergy retreats and at small meals with other colleagues.

I would also make routine opportunities for clergy to gather in prayer, study, and consultation. The deanery I served in Western Michigan made real the college of presbyters and called out a better priesthood and diaconate in us by the bishop's regular gathering with the clergy for prayer, study, and counsel.

The reality of the bishop's office is that no bishop can be in direct touch with each member of the diocese, but their ministry is mediated through events, times of worship, and the ministry of each member of the clergy. It is vital that a bishop build a college of ministers that is more than managers reporting to the head of the agency, but fellow followers of Christ who serve in his church together. I have been blessed to serve under mature bishops who have modeled that kind of church, and I would hope to do the same.

To return to the growing edges for a moment. When a bishop has time with a clergy member who is disaffected by issues of the church or the world, they can speak with them and know them, guide them and their community with familiarity and grace. I have watched social institutions wrenched apart by missives from the uninvolved. But when you have sat at table with people and know them, you can be worthy of their trust when the times come to address difficult issues, whether that is immigration or administration, racism or pay. We can no longer say of some group in the church, they do not understand. We have been living with the Gospel for two thousand years plus. We know that we are one body washed in one baptism to serve one Lord. And we can live that together, as long as we do not start when the cameras are already rolling.

**5. Across our country and within the diocese; there has been conflict over a variety of issues including differing views on diversity and inclusion, there has been concern about health, the economy, and systemic racism; and there are the challenges of the pandemic and the realities of ministry within it. Tell us your thoughts about how you would continue the healing process among various groups, how have you proclaimed a message of hope during this difficult time, and how have you advocated for social change in a way that unites?**

Over the summer, I went for five months without communion because I would not take it if I could not take it with my parish. I realized when we got back together that the lack of communion was a great lived parable for the situation of our nation and world.

Theologically we are separated from God and each other in profound ways by sin. Communion is one of the primary ways we embody our coming back to unity in Christ with God and with each other. But the sacrament is always "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace" as we say in the Catechism.

We have to find ways of coming together in the church, of being together despite and even because of the ways that we are divided in the world. In part, that works by being together before the temperature is at the boiling point. We have to practice before the crisis, if at all possible.

It will be important to simply be present first. It will matter to have time and conversations that are easier, that are based in the basic teachings that we all hold in common, and only then to build toward deeper listening and telling the truths that are harder to tell and to hold.

The reality is that there are basic teachings of Jesus that we are all held to by our vows as baptized people and faith in the Bible. We have a common mission to live as God's people and love each other. We have to redefine that center together; then we have to listen to how each one sees that lived out.

There is no place for racial divisions within the Body of Christ. We have long read that in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free. We must go back to those passages and then hear from each other what that may be like for each other.

The events of the last few years have laid bare our nation's continuing struggle to embody its ideals around equality and the rights endowed by our Creator. I have found that in deeply entrenched communities it always helps to go back to the values that define us first and work outwards. This also helps to stay on common ground when it is possible.

In my role as the Phoenix Fire Department chaplain, I also support the police when officers are injured or killed in the line of duty. This role allows me to preach and even to offer counsel to the city leaders, and during this summer I was able to advocate for conversation and understanding for police. But that relationship also gave me a unique place to ask credibly for an understanding of the realities that underlie the cries for social justice. I met and prayed with police officers who were holding the protest lines during the summer and spoke with leaders of



the protest movement who were separating their work from the rioters and looters here locally.

As a pastor and priest, these conversations allowed me to preach and teach about the experiences that drove both and our call to love our neighbors that is not nullified by our politics.

Without our normal pulpit this summer, the work of proclaiming hope became pastoral conversations over the phone and in person, by showing up and hearing people's fears and then talking them through the call of Christ to be a light in the darkness, the salt of the earth. But that was easy because of our history and experience as the pandemic began.

As last summer began and the riots were just starting, we hosted the Union of Black Episcopalians at Christ Church of the Ascension, a traditional and traditionally conservative parish in Paradise Valley, an upscale village between Phoenix and Scottsdale, for remembrance of Absalom Jones. It was a year after we lost our eighty-nine-year-old African American deacon to eternity, so, for our parish, it was double saints' day.

## **6. Is there anything else you would like us to know?**

When the Diocese of Western Michigan was searching for their next bishop, I was part of the search team. I remember the excitement and growing sense of who the diocese was and what we were looking for in a new diocesan. I also remember the openness to the work of the Spirit that pervaded those long hours, days, weeks, and months of work. I want to thank you for that work and that openness to the Holy Spirit.

I rise early to pray, journal, and exercise before our children wake up. I make my wife Amy a cappuccino most mornings, and then we check-in and begin the day. We end our nights as a family praying. I would not be here praying with you without all of them.

These essays and documents will hopefully give you a taste of my excitement for you and for the Diocese. The Church Universal needs the witness of a diocese that is willing to stay together and a bishop who will guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the church. That guarding is the guarding of a shepherd who lives among their Master's flock. It is the guard of love, of knowing the flock, and feeding them from the rich pastures of the Master's land.

You have so much to celebrate, and while there are challenges, you have strong systems, a rich history, a legacy of faithful stewardship, and bonds of faith. I look forward to discerning with you if God is calling us to walk his hills and valleys together.