

The Reverend John C. Bauerschmidt

The Diocese of Louisiana

Responses to Questions

I. Tell us what “called” you to the priesthood, how that “call” has grown, how it relates to your relationship with Jesus Christ and His church. And why now did you agree to have your name submitted in nomination as Bishop of Tennessee?

Though I was baptized in the Episcopal Church as an infant, and have some childhood memories of the Church, my parents were not active in the Church when I was a young person. I was effectively “un-churched”. Born and bred in the South, I encountered Christianity in a broadly evangelical form as a part of the cultural milieu and in the conversion experiences of teenaged schoolmates and friends, and was both put off and intrigued. Though not a Christian believer, I wanted to understand, and also to define my own beliefs. It seemed important to me to be able to offer some answers to “the big questions”: Who am I? What is the world about? Where are we headed? Christians at least believed these questions were important. I owe a great deal to these early experiences.

At the age of fifteen I was led to C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity*, a book whose title I misunderstood to be mildly critical of Christian belief. That a person could make such a mistake seems incredible to me now (?!), but I swear it was so for me. God has a wonderful sense of humor. Lewis’ arguments for Christian faith opened up to me the whole world of classical Christian conviction. What I read echoed within me: nothing manipulative, but instead a deep appreciation of the past, a reasonable appeal to the conscience, and a steady love of beauty and order that moved both heart and mind. It seemed to me that Jesus Christ brought these things together. I recognized in this particular echoing the things that mattered most to me: “the big questions”, and the broad sketches of some answers. This has made all the difference to my life.

I returned to the Episcopal Church as a teenager at the time that many of my peers were ceasing to be active in the Church; not a typical journey, but one which was graceful for me. I date my call to priesthood from these early experiences. For me, the call to the priesthood is inextricably linked to my call to Christian belief and the life of the community of faith. I cannot distinguish them in myself. I entered the discernment process for ordination while a college student, and entered theological seminary immediately after college. I was ordained deacon when twenty-four years old.

My call has grown and changed over the past twenty years or so of life as a priest. In origin, I think I conceived of my call as being one centered on prayer and pastoral care, stewardship of the sacraments and preaching. Of course, these things define the priesthood, and I’m drawn to them.

In the last few years I’ve come to think of my call as centered on pastoral leadership, which includes everything I’ve mentioned above, but re-focused in a different way around the Church. I enjoy the chance to help shape and form Christian community in concert with others: partly the work of education and formation, and partly the work of a more mysterious mentoring that I can only call “pastoral leadership”. I enjoy thinking and

working strategically on behalf of the community, and helping to shape it's life for the future.

Re-focusing my call in this way has been challenging for me. It has meant leaving my own "comfort zone" of the things that I think I do well, in order to connect with God's People on a deeper level, as a mentor and leader. I've had to become a better communicator with large groups of people, sharing myself and inviting others into intimacy with God. I've learned to be a different kind of preacher, focused on shaping the life of both individuals and the community as a whole. I've capitalized on some old gifts in a new way, and also developed new gifts which were beyond my own appraisal of my abilities. God has been good in leading me beyond imprisonment to my own inclinations and in enabling me to stretch in this way.

I've allowed my name to go forward in this search process for a new Bishop of the Diocese of Tennessee because I think God may be leading me in a new direction as a leader in the Church, bringing me once again out of my parochial "comfort zone" into new challenges. I hope in all things to be able to rely on God's grace, who through various challenges builds up Christ's Body, the Church. I look forward to seeing what God has in store.

II. Describe your style of leadership and discuss where your leadership has excelled and an instance where it has fallen short.

As a leader, I am self-directed, with a clear personal sense of motivation. I am inspired by ideas, and as I leader I share ideas and communicate them effectively. I build consensus as we move ahead. I help articulate a common, shared vision, and look for others with gifts for implementing the goals of the organization. I am able to discern these gifts in others, and am able to build the team needed to pursue the goals.

Leadership rests on shared gifts. The Apostle Paul's theology of gifts for ministry makes this clear. No one leader has all the gifts that are necessary for the community. Part of the unique role of leadership is nurturing the gifts of others.

Conflict can be an opportunity for growth. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For a wide door for effective work is opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. 16:9). Leadership in this context consists in keeping the goal in sight, and keeping that goal before the eyes of the community, while making sure that all voices are heard.

Change and transition are the normal state of Christian community. We are transitional people, passing from death to life. From the Exodus onward, God's People have placed their leaders at the head of the procession. The leader makes sure that the procession remains a procession, purposeful and ordered and not a chaotic dash of individuals to every point of the compass, but the way to do this is to lead from the front.

For the past nine years I have been rector of a program-sized parish that has struggled to make the transition to a larger, resource-sized pattern of life. I know about change and transition at first hand.

I have led Christ Church, Covington, successfully in expanding its stewardship, doubling pledged income in nine years. I have expanded our liturgical schedule on Sundays by adding an additional late-morning Sunday service, which has enabled our growth, increasing our average Sunday attendance by over ten percent. I have helped to build relationship, trust, and a common mission with our Parish Day School and affiliated Continuing Care Retirement Community, which are important parts of our common life. I have built our parish program of Formation and Outreach so that they are second to none amongst comparable parishes in the Diocese of Louisiana. I have led a successful parish Capital Campaign.

It has been more difficult to grow our staff to meet the explosion of life that has resulted. In our transition, resources are still scarce, and we are often forced to “make do” with what we have rather than what we might actually need to meet the challenge. Still, I think I have been able to re-deploy staff, given the limitations, in the best way possible to answer our needs and to move us forward.

III. Given the tenor of the Episcopal Church today, the hope of reconciliation and healing is on the hearts and minds of many. What is your hope as it relates to a diocese and the wider Church?

My hope is that the Episcopal Church will find both a way to stay together and to remain a part of the Anglican Communion. I’m willing to work for this. I realize this will be a difficult task, requiring the Episcopal Church to operate differently in a number of ways. As Christians who recite the Creeds, we are called to unity, not just locally or nationally but also internationally. We cannot walk away from any of these responsibilities. This is part of the way of faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

We can hardly argue for unity on the diocesan or national level while disregarding the unity of the Church throughout the world. In comparison with the unity of the world-wide Communion, other considerations pale in importance. Our mutual forbearance and love are called for, a powerful witness to the world.

The temptation to disintegration has its own power. In order to remain a world-wide Communion of Churches, Anglicanism is not going to have the luxury of continuing with “business as usual”. We can see the trajectory of change already set in the world-wide Communion. Change is difficult, and will take time. But I believe that change, along the lines of the process called for in the Windsor Report, that builds up the unity and communion of the Church, is the only way toward true reconciliation and healing.

IV. What are the most important attributes in one who is called to be a bishop, and why?

The bishop is “chief pastor”, and a sign of unity. Pastoral care is leadership of the community. The Christian pastor is a mentor to the community, helping people to grow spiritually and to become leaders themselves. Pastoral care, as mentoring, requires the personal touch. As St Paul wrote, “We were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:8).

Another way of describing pastoral leadership is as spiritual direction, extending to the community as a whole. Every director desires to point his or her charges toward the Scriptures, to encourage personal growth through prayer and reflection, and to help the community see the work of God in its midst.

Yet another way of describing pastoral leadership is as formation. As mentor and director, the pastor is forming the life of the community. Formation is more inclusive and wide-ranging than the classroom model of traditional education. Formation looks to the Scriptures, and to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Formation looks to the pattern of Jesus Christ, and seeks to form persons in it.

To do these things, the bishop needs, above all, to be a person of prayer, a theologian, and teacher. Without these things, there will be no “heart” to the ministry.

The bishop needs to inspire the community. He or she needs to be an effective preacher and creative communicator in written and electronic media.

Along with “chief pastor”, the bishop needs to be a “missionary-minded” leader. Mission is directed to the world outside the Church, in evangelism and outreach. The bishop is going to have to re-deploy his or her own time away from maintenance and toward mission. Again, this will be costly to the Bishop’s own sense of well-being as he or she contends with people’s differing expectations. A self-motivated person is needed.

I suspect the role of the bishop (like the role of other pastoral leaders) is changing. Again, the theme of transition. So the bishop will need to be flexible and nimble on his or her feet. The days of episcopacy as a distant “hierarchy” insulated from the realities of the Church’s mission have already passed away. Change is afoot, and so we need to get moving.

V. How do you take care of yourself?

A) Spiritually: “Return to your heart... for God’s image is there. Christ dwells in the inner self; in the inner self you will be renewed in the image of God” (St Augustine, *Sermons on the Gospel of John*, 18).

“It is absurd to think that we can enter heaven without first entering our own souls – without getting to know ourselves” (St Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*).

I believe that the journey inward is the way in which we deepen our relationship with God and with others. Reflection is the key. I pray, giving myself the luxury of silence in which God can speak. For a pastor, the only way to pray privately is to schedule the time, and I do. I make an annual directed retreat. I pray the Daily Office. I am a frequent communicant. I have a spiritual director because I believe we grow through shared perspective in community. I make my confession regularly. These are all tools from our tradition that bring us into the presence of God and make reflection possible. They have shaped my spiritual and vocational life.

B) Emotionally: I take regular days off. I take all of my vacation time, every bit of it. I participated in my first sabbatical from parish ministry two years ago. Ideas are important to

me, and I tend to “live out of my head”. I nurture my imagination, mostly through books but also through movies and music. I’m an avid reader: mostly theology, fiction, history, *reportage*, travel literature, and poetry. A recent discovery is the poetry and prose of Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz.

I enjoy cooking and scale modeling, in which (unlike parochial work) the results are instantly discernible.

C) Physically: I exercise regularly (religiously, you might say): running and bike riding. I like to walk.

VI. What is it you bring/offer to the Diocese of Tennessee?

a) I bring a wide experience of the Church.

Since ordination in 1984, I have served in a variety of different parishes, including three years as assistant in an urban, resource-sized parish in the Northeast, five years in town ministry as rector of a pastoral-sized parish in a rural North Carolina county, and over nine years as rector of a growing program-sized parish in a suburban community in the metro New Orleans area. I know what it means to be involved in parish ministry in a variety of different contexts.

My present parish is a complex institution, involving a large parish day school that is central to our parish life, as well as an affiliated Continuing Care Retirement Community. The vision that we hold up to our members and to the community is of a common, shared mission. I’m used to coordinating multiple constituencies and interests, and guiding them in the right direction. We have embraced some big projects over the past nine years (a parish capital campaign and property acquisition, the expansion of day school enrollment and facilities, and the expansion of our CCRC property and facilities) and brought them so far to successful completion. We have some big new projects for the future. I know how to think and act strategically in the advancement of the Gospel mission.

I also served for four years in campus ministry, while engaged as a graduate student at Oxford University, UK. I have firsthand experience of the global nature of the Church, and an appreciation of “where we’ve come from” and what we’re connected to. I have a global and historical perspective on our Faith and Mission.

I have experience of the Church at both the Diocesan and National level, having served on both the Executive Board and the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Louisiana, as well as a clerical deputy to the 2006 General Convention. In these contexts, I have worked with clergy and laity with many points of view, on issues affecting the wider Church. I have a sense of the issues involved in the life of the Church beyond my own parish.

I know what it is to have some success, as well as failure, as a priest in a variety of pastoral contexts. I know that God is present, in both cases, and that both are opportunities for growing in the grace and knowledge of God.

b) I am theologically well grounded.

I know how theological vision is lived out in a parish context. I have some professional training and credentials in theology beyond the norm, but the place in which the knowledge and love of God become real is in the practical laboratory of parish and diocesan life. Theology is rooted in prayer, of course, and the theologian is “one who prays”.

The Person of Jesus Christ is central to my theology. Faith is rooted in relationship with Jesus Christ: God in flesh, a Person embodying both divine and human natures. Understanding that we are saved through Jesus’ humanity has been a crucial insight for me, because “what is not assumed is not redeemed”.

Love and relationship, and the community of faith, are central to my theology. Relationship underpins the community of faith, the communion and fellowship we share as Christians; but of course it’s rooted itself in the prior relationship of the Persons of the Trinity. At the heart of this relationship is love. Christians who are baptized into this relationship of Father, Son, and Spirit are brought into a relationship of love with the One who is Love. Keats said, “A fact is not a truth until you love it”. True for poets; true also for Christians.

The Scriptures are central to my theology. “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”. The Scriptures are inspired by God; God speaks through them. Study of the Scriptures is more than assembling proof texts, however. John Donne once remarked that to study the Scriptures doesn’t mean making a concordance, but instead applying the Scriptures to ones own life. I take this to be the same insight as that of philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre: we need to let texts interpret us, even more perhaps than we need to interpret them.

The sacraments are central to my theology. God is the chief actor in the sacraments, which are celebrated in community. God works in them objectively, yet we are touched by them subjectively. They are means of grace, in which God supplies *gratis* what we cannot provide for ourselves. Grace cannot be scheduled, and has a way of showing up in all sorts of contexts when we’re not looking for it, but in the celebration of the sacraments we truly do encounter God and receive the gift of grace.

Finally, the Cross is central to my theology, the chief expression of both love and relationship. For me, the Cross is about sacrificial, redemptive love. God is passionate about us, willing to go the distance in pursuit of humanity. This love is for us healing, forgiveness of sin, and reconciliation. It brings victory, integration, and new life. Understanding this, entering into it and making it a part of my life, is the work of a lifetime.

c) I am mission-minded.

The Church “proclaims, welcomes, forms, and sends” its members in mission. We proclaim the Gospel; we welcome those who are seeking; we are formed and form others in the faith; and we are sent in mission to the world. The last movement of mission (outreach) turns

back into the first movement of proclamation (evangelism). This repetitive pattern is at the heart of the ministry to which I have been called.

With this as our “mission statement”, I’ve been able to take some new initiatives in a high growth area that have aided us in doing this work.

- 1) We created an additional Sunday morning service to give us the space to continue to grow. At the same time, we created a contemplative Taize evening service that would offer an alternative way into parish life, and help anchor us in prayer.
- 2) We designed a new staff position of “Coordinator of Newcomer Ministries” to help with the greeting, identification, incorporation, and tracking of newcomers.
- 3) We created a full-time staff position, “Coordinator of Youth Ministries”, to minister to and with our youth population. We converted facilities and created a “Youth Center” to be a home for this ministry.
- 4) We expanded our facilities and added a new dedicated nursery space for our youngest parishioners and visitors.
- 5) We created new small formation groups to help us engage people in mission. Formation is not religious “entertainment”, but a tool for mission. We focus intentionally on creating leaders for the Church, by identifying, empowering, training, and nurturing leaders for the faith community.
- 6) We created a catechumenal process that was aimed at newcomers to our parish that would orient them, build relationships, form them in faith and ministry, and help to incorporate them into the life of the community.
- 7) We renovated our church facilities, both inside and outside, so that they could be welcoming “tools for our mission”. One look will convince you of our success.

Mission is multi-dimensional. William Temple is supposed to have said that the Church is the only institution in the world that exists for the sake of those who are not its members. When my present parish engaged in a capital campaign, we built into the program a “tithe” of money raised for major outreach projects that would engage our members in “hands on” work. We paid for and built two new Habitat for Humanity houses and funded a mission trip to Honduras, in the midst of a rather busy schedule of year to year outreach projects. I’m proud of what God has done in our midst.

The Church is not the only place where God is found; still, I’m confident that the community of the Church is the “Body of Christ” and the place where we encounter Jesus Christ through our encounter with each other.

It is a privilege to be considered by the Diocese of Tennessee for this new ministry, and I am grateful for your attention and prayer in this process.