

## **The Rev. James L. Burns**

The Diocese of New York

Responses to the Questions

### ***I. What called you to the priesthood and how has that call grown, how does it relate to my relationship with Jesus Christ and His church? Why have I now agreed to have my name submitted in nomination as Bishop of Tennessee?***

It is both overly simplistic and incredibly complex to say that God called me to the priesthood, but that is the only answer I can give. I experienced a pull toward ordained ministry early in my life and then embarked on a determined flight from it. I wanted to do something that would help others, just not in that context. After two degrees in psychology, a career in mental health, and a mature rediscovery of the Church of my upbringing I began to listen once more to the inner voice urging me to offer what I had to the service of God in the Church. As I began to be open to this possibility I experienced God's call through the community of Christ Church, Nashville and her rector Eric Greenwood. I found the calling confirmed by others not in the church. And, finally, in my sense of harmony about the decision, best described in the words of Frederic Buechner's definition of "vocation": "The place where one's deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Over the 24 years of my ordained ministry I have found that my relationship with Jesus Christ has grown – not so much in my certainty about what His will is for all things, but in my trust in Him and my dependence on His love and guidance in my life. I find that I sometimes understand Him less while wanting to know Him more. When I attend to my relationship with Jesus and offer myself in His service then occasions for that service arise along with a better understanding of what He would have me do.

I have agreed to allow my name to be submitted in nomination for Bishop of Tennessee at this time because I believe that I am to be open to the leading of God's Holy Spirit. It's God's ministry, not mine.

### ***II. What is my style of leadership? Where has it excelled and what is an instance of where it has fallen short?***

My style of leadership is first to listen and observe and then to prayerfully articulate and offer a vision. I then try to communicate that vision as well as possible and invite others to share it. If there is no ownership of the vision then I will look to revise it based on what I learn from others. I seek to empower and encourage others to work for the fulfillment of whatever needs to be done to fulfill the vision that we now share.

I feel that this model of leadership has worked for me in helping St. Thomas, Knoxville build a church and become a self-supporting parish. I feel that it worked in helping Christ Church Cathedral heal from a divisive termination of ministry and in accepting its role to be both a caring parish community and a Cathedral in service of the Diocese of Lexington. I feel that it has worked in helping my current parish become a strong community of diverse membership with a commitment to service of others. It has fallen short in my present parish with regards to designing a Christian Education program that will generate a commitment of time and involvement from a highly over-committed and mobile population. (But we're not giving up!)

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

My hope first of all is that the Church, at every level – parish, diocese, province, and world-wide Anglican Communion would focus the overwhelming preponderance of its energy and resources on the tasks of making Christ known and serving the world, and most especially the poor and vulnerable, in His name. To that end my hope is that the Church at every level would model for the world what it means to live in covenant. In pre-marriage counseling I explain to couples that marriage is a covenant not just a mutually agreeable relationship. A covenant is not only a commitment to another it is also a commitment to the commitment, so that when the parties in a relationship find themselves in a place of disagreement and struggle they remain in relationship and “labor to be reconciled” (as the Canons say) because of their covenantal commitment to their relationship. This is my understanding of God’s relationship to humanity in Christ who is the new covenant. Despite our rebellion and sin, God does not give up on us because God’s way is the way of covenant. My hope for the Church is that it can actually be a witness to the power of covenant.

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

I believe that the most important attributes for one called to the office of bishop are: Proclamation – one who can articulate and proclaim the Good News of God in Christ in the context of the world in which we are now living. Pastor – one who cares for those in his or her charge, especially the clergy and lay leadership of the Diocese. Presence – one who is willing to be the face and voice of the Church in his or her community.

***V. How do I take care of myself spiritually, emotionally, and physically?***

I care for myself spiritually by keeping a daily discipline of prayer which includes both the Daily Office and meditation and spiritual reading. I also seek the spiritual counsel of others.

I care for myself emotionally by working with a psychotherapist and by paying attention to my emotional health and needs. I also devote time to activities that I enjoy: my family, reading, cooking, films. I take regular days off and use all my available vacation time each year.

I care for myself physically by trying to exercise regularly, having regular physical exams, and practicing moderation in my dietary habits.

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

What I bring to my ministry at this time in my life, and thus to the Diocese of Tennessee is 1.) A strong commitment to the Episcopal Church and a desire to see her weather the current controversies and become stronger, as well as a desire to see the unity of the Anglican Communion preserved while honoring the unique attributes of her constituent provinces and churches. 2.) Nearly twenty-five years of parish experience in both large and small congregations. 3.) Experience in Diocesan and National Church structures and programs. 4.) Skills as a preacher, teacher, pastor, healer and reconciler. 5.) A firm belief that our world desperately needs to hear and understand the Good News of God revealed in Jesus Christ. 6.) A love of the Diocese of Tennessee, where I began my ordained ministry, and an understanding of her history.