

1. *What are the points in your vocation that direct you toward the Episcopate?*

The first point—the central point—is a particular moment. It occurred at the Ewen United Methodist Church, a tiny church, in Ewen, Michigan, in a tiny town (I bet there are several “Ewens” in Maine). It was December 13, 1970. I’m told it was a wintry day. The Reverend James Hilliard, a student pastor, officiated at the Sunday worship service, and at some point during the liturgy he poured water over the head of a nearly three month old infant, saying, “*Thomas James, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” Whatever its shape, in every context, Jesus Christ calls us to ministry that is always rooted in Holy Baptism. From this foundational theology all else is understood, including ordained ministry. The genesis of any call goes back to the moment of baptism.

The second point, which is really ongoing, occurs whenever a lay or ordained person says, “Thomas, where are you about call?” or “I hope you’re still open to offering yourself as a bishop.” I take such questions and statements as affirmation from faithful people, some are members of the parish I serve, others are clergy and laity from across our church, who say they see in me particular gifts and skills for oversight, for connecting others, and for sharing my enthusiasm for the Gospel—the person, nature, and work of Jesus Christ.

A decade ago I was briefly part of the Diocese of Minnesota’s episcopal search process; they received my name from the Church Deployment Office (its name then). I responded to the essay questions, but it became clear to me, almost immediately, that I was both too young, and not at all knowledgeable about the ministry of bishop. There have been other invitations to episcopal searches. I share this because this discernment began long ago, yet because of place, people, and timing it’s been easy to say, “no, thank you” rather than “okay, I’m all in.”

Then, in 2015, a priest colleague nominated me in the Diocese of Western North Carolina, and that discernment process resulted in my being a nominee. It was a blessing to be part of the process, and I loved every minute. Western North Carolina was seeking a spiritual leader and pastor (more than anything else), and there were several moments that led us continually to say “yes” to one another. I felt called, primarily, to the place and to the specifics of what they were seeking. What’s also true is that I anticipated carefully the outcome: that I would not be elected.

What I did not expect, and what’s relevant to the question you’re asking, was how my thought-process, and prayers changed following the election. At this point, obviously in retrospect, I understand that it’s necessary for me to listen for God calling *simultaneously* to two things:

- to the place: *am I called to the Diocese of Maine?*
- to the ministry of chief pastor: *am I called to episcopacy?*

My sense is that prior to my walking with the Diocese of Western North Carolina, I focused solely on the call to a *place*, to a particular profile. Now, I remain open to both a call to the ministry of episcopate and also to a particular diocese—I think this reflects a more wholistic theology, maybe even getting at the Prayer Book’s words, “to be a bishop in the Church of God to serve in the Diocese of N. (p. 514).

Bishops, just like lay leaders, priests, and deacons, serve not only in particularly local places, but also beyond, within the Episcopal Church. As a long-time deputy to General Convention, a former member of the Joint Nominating Committee for the Election of the Presiding Bishop, and now, the chair of the Board of Trustees of the Church Pension Group, I have been called to leadership in larger circles of our church—all points of discernment. In each of these communities I've been invited both to learn and to teach. Consequently, I have seen first-hand how our church's multiculturalism of languages, cultures, and practices, reveals the Holy Spirits uniting us *because* of our diversity. I have seen, and been the recipient of the Episcopal Church's wide welcome and bold witness.

In all of this discernment I am most comfortable saying that God is calling me to offer myself—my gifts, my graces, my person—to the Episcopal Church. God has given me gifts, and I believe also the character, for what is needed now as we engage God's mission in a rapidly changing and challenging world. My hunch is that the work of ministry in this season demands from leaders, especially bishops, the capacity to balance the big picture of vision and strategy with the day-to-day relational tasks of building the kingdom. This is a final point in offering myself to you: I enjoy finding that balance, which like God's mercy, is new every morning. I am thankful to God for giving me a tremendous amount of energy, and take to heart a line from Colossians, *for this I toil and struggle with all the energy God powerfully inspires within me* (1:29).

Everything I have learned and experienced in life, in my relationship with Jesus Christ, in my marriage, and in my relationships with others, has brought me to this point. I am neither worthy nor able, but I am open to the Spirit, and to the people of God called to be the Episcopal Church in Maine.

## *2 What attracts you to the idea of being the 10th Bishop of Maine?*

The first attraction to episcopacy in Maine is the prospect of following two very faithful, and quite different, bishops. From my vantage Bishops Knudsen and Lane served you very faithfully. Their styles, while different from each other, displayed a common characteristic of pastoral sensitivity to the entire diocese, and the willingness to tell truths that are not always easy to say or to hear. There is a legacy of strong leadership, and when one is new, it's a gift to imagine building upon a foundation of health. No community or diocese is perfect, but you have a history that leads me toward you, and makes me wonder whether my gifts for loving and leading might be put to use among you.

You express in a clear way a desire for your tenth bishop to be a follower and lover of Jesus Christ. This is essential in my attraction to you because it reveals a glimpse of the people who identified the hopes and dreams for your diocese. That you seek a love of Jesus Christ to be your next bishop reveals a connection between what you seek, and how I understand my spirituality.

In addition to my own Bishop's encouragement about episcopal ministry generally, I am listening to clergy colleagues from around the Episcopal Church, and especially in New England, who are saying, "Thomas, we see your gifts and they might be well-suited in Maine."

In your profile there isn't explicit reference to Total Ministry or Baptismal Ministry, yet I perceive that in these two decades you've embraced an ecclesiology that is rooted more in baptism than ordination. Is that right? Setting aside whatever numeric and monetary diminishment or gain Episcopal Churches face, I believe bishops must continually imagine, and help to create, the church in the 21st century. For me, a primary building block for this future is our Prayer Book's emphasis on Holy Baptism. The Prayer Book itself is now 40 years old, and while parts of it need refreshing, its laser-like focus on baptism is a treasure for any community (e.g. diocese) who wants to invigorate ministry and mission, this includes the smallest or the largest parishes, and the ones in-between. I am interested in the opportunity to teach about this, and to work alongside committed disciples of Jesus to build the church.

The plurality of voices and political perspectives in Maine also appeals. Maine isn't diverse when it comes to race, but it certainly is when it comes to wealth and poverty, year-round and seasonal, coastal and inland. You have diversity, and even some tension; with sensitive and strategic episcopal leadership, those gifts and dynamics could propel your future.

You tell a story of leadership in the public square, both in your local communities, as well as throughout the State of Maine. You speak up and bear witness. The bishop must be a compassionate voice in all settings, including in society. Does the question from the ordinal, "will you be merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers, and defend those who have no helper?" (Prayer Book, p. 518) take on greater weight in these days? I believe it does, and I sense in you a longing for a bishop who can do this strategically, focusing on the Good News of Jesus Christ, while remaining connected to those who believe bishops ought not to meddle in politics. I do this well, and doubtless, if I am your bishop I'll have ample opportunity to grow as a differentiated and emotionally mature spiritual leader.

I can imagine being the 10th Bishop of Maine and working with other bishops and dioceses in Province 1 (and with ecumenical and interfaith partners beyond the Episcopal Church); there's a proximity, a closeness that is partly about geography and partly about culture, that the church outside of New England doesn't have. The next Bishop of Maine will be embraced by loving and wise colleagues, and that's a huge draw.

There are two more things about Maine as a place. First, there's something about my feeling at home in New England culture(s). No expert, and no native, am I, but following two decades here I've developed a great appreciation and respect for our ways, including our ways of being the Episcopal Church. To be sure, Maine is unique; I would need to learn about what makes you different from other parts of New England, and that's exciting! Certainly the natural landscape of Maine—in every part—leads me to fantasize about driving around the State of Maine and beholding and cherishing God's creation.

Second, as a yooper (a native of Michigan's upper peninsula), there is much about your state's rural parts that are quite similar in culture and beauty to the U.P. I don't want to overstate the comparison, but I relish the idea of serving in all of Maine, including the parts that might feel a lot like home.

*3 What does being the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement mean to you and your ministry?*

Attending church camp every summer was the highlight of the year for me, from 3rd grade until high school. I still have close friends from those years at Camp Michigamme, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. There are more stories to share with you about why those weeks continue to inform my faith, but it was there where I learned the song, "I am the vine and you are the branches." Now, I immediately associate our Presiding Bishop's use of the words, "Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement" with those happy days of singing that song, complete with the dorky hand-motions.

Yet the song conveys an essential truth: Jesus's message invites us into a **relationship** with him, with each other, and with the world. To be a branch is to be part of something larger than ourselves; that's a bold statement about connection and solidarity, about being together, and seeing ourselves as part of a church, and yes Christianity itself, that's changing and growing.

The word *movement* suggests to me that we are on a journey, and that we are doing this work of discipleship and apostleship *together*. For any diocese this ought to be welcomed news, and especially for a community such as yours, where according to a 2015 Gallup study, only 20% of Mainers attend church weekly, less than 48 other states, and only slightly better than the State of Vermont.<sup>1</sup> When we speak about a "movement" rather than "institution" we're immediately issuing an invitation to something that's dynamic and moving, not static. Our church is a movement that's forward-looking yet steadfast in its proclamation of Jesus Christ, who is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. The bishop, along with all the faith communities she or he serves, becomes the chief message-sender, saying, "we are disciples who make disciples," and "on Christ the solid rock we stand."

There have been too many seasons in our church when we have let fundamentalist Christians corrupt the Gospel's message of radical love. Admittedly there have also been too few of us in leadership consistently preaching Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Thankfully, right now, our Presiding Bishop helps us proclaim boldly and unapologetically Jesus's love, his crucifixion and resurrection, without ever diminishing people of other faiths.

In my local context Jewish and Muslim leaders consistently ask those of us who are Christian to claim our ground. A rabbi with whom I co-officiated a wedding last year said, obviously in jest, "sometimes you liberal Christians make yourselves pretzels to avoid offending me. But I'm really more of a bagel girl than a pretzel, so stop it. It's okay for you to love Jesus and to talk about him!" To be the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement fills me with joy and energy; I consider such joy and energy God-given gifts, and those with whom I partner in ministry will say I share them freely, both within the church, and beyond it.

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<sup>1</sup> A 2016 report by Seth Koenig at [hashtagMaine.bangordailynews.com](http://hashtagMaine.bangordailynews.com)

The *Jesus Movement*, and let's be honest it's a slogan, is one way to say that the church exists because of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In and by the power of the Holy Spirit the church is called to be a witnessing community. We witness to God's love in Jesus by proclaiming the good news of that love and by joining in God's work of love and justice in the world. At the heart of our proclamation is also an invitation to others to join in the resurrection movement from death to life.

If the "Jesus part" is central, so too is the "Episcopal branch" part. In other words, as Anglicans we have a broad and capacious understanding that we neither possess all the answers, nor are we left without ongoing sustenance and nourishment. The signposts for where to travel are the great Sacraments of our tradition: Holy Baptism and the Holy Eucharist. Whenever Christ feeds us with his Body and Blood we are changed. Whenever we affirm our baptismal promises we celebrate the awesome news that everything we do is "with God's help."

In my spiritual life—what sometimes feels like a movement where I take one step forward and two steps back—the Presence of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of Holy Communion has increasing value and power. Quite often I find myself receiving Communion within a posture of intercession, actually asking God for guidance, saying, as I consume the consecrated bread and wine, "fill me and use me."

The Diocese of Maine's history with the Society of Saint John the Evangelist (who were once known as the Cowley Fathers) means that unlike some other parts of New England there is in your neck of the woods a tradition to reflect the breadth of our liturgical heritage and sacramental theology. Your next bishop will be a beneficiary of your spirituality, in all its manifestations. Moreover, she or he will be responsive in finding ways to integrate your history with a contemporary expression. For your future I hope the Bishop of Maine encourages liturgical experimentation, and continuous learning, while also connecting worshiping communities who want to be innovative, with those for whom doing so is their daily bread. In this light, "movement" equals *continuing AND changing*.

In that sense the Jesus Movement could also be a kind of job description for bishops, couldn't it? To oversee and enliven a region (or in your case a very large state) might well include working with clergy and lay people to foster local faith communities who are moving toward each other to get the resources they need to achieve whatever it is they understand to be God's mission in that particular place.

When it's about Jesus and movement the bishop's words and gestures will look and feel more like an invitation than a directive, and the faith community will be associated more with their mission than their building.

With God's help you can keep creating outposts across Maine—within and beyond the buildings—that are filled with a generous spirit; Episcopalians who are known from Limestone to Kittery, and from Rangeley to Eastport, as joyous and genuine people concerned for justice. For that to happen your next bishop will not only connect you with each other, but also with the larger Episcopal Church and Christianity. And, certainly with leaders in other faiths, and of no faith.

The Jesus Movement, its language and energy, issues a continual call for me to describe reality well, and with hope, to be a joyful cheerleader in whatever community I serve even when circumstances are difficult, because there are always signs of new life. I suppose that's why St. Paul's arresting questions drive me to go deeper, and to live more honestly: *But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?* Romans 10:14.

In the end, however, the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement means that I shall continue to pray, for without daily prayer and meditation, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. Without prayer, to borrow from the 1928 Book of Common Prayer, *there is no health in [me]*, which is why my day always begins with this prayer from the late and great, Theodore Parker Ferris:

*This is another day, O Lord, I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.* (found also in the Prayer Book, p. 461).