

The Reverend Dr. Douglas Sparks
Diocese of Central Pennsylvania
December 19, 2014

1. How are you called to the episcopacy?

I'm seasoned in ministry and feel called to serve as a bishop, to offer my voice and experience to the wider church and share what I've learned to the ongoing conversations as we face our common challenges. Episcopal ministry requires knowledge of the global community and formation in the local faith community as well. A bishop's ministry is multi-faceted. A bishop is called to serve the communities entrusted to their care without distinction. It requires experience in various settings so as to understand and have compassion for their issues, regardless of population or age. I've worked creatively and collegially in rural, urban and suburban faith communities. A bishop needs to appreciate the challenges churches face financially, and to rely on the creativity of lay leaders. Through my experiences, I've come to know these issues well! A bishop serves the wider church. I have a devotion to and passion for our polity and have served as a Deputy to General Convention. A bishop is also called to ministry in the Anglican Communion. I've served in the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia as Dean of the Cathedral in Wellington and have a heart for the unity of the communion.

2. How are you called to the episcopacy in Central PA?

I admire your honesty and transparency in describing your past, the present challenges and opportunities you face and your hopes for the future. You are a people of hope, focused on the needs of others in your outreach, servant ministries and Companion Relationship. 14 active Jubilee Ministry centers is an amazing witness! I hope that each faith community, regardless of size, is committed to caring for its neighbors! Healthy congregations live a balanced life focused on outreach to others and ministry to members of the faith community. I loved the year I served as a transitional deacon. I have been blessed by the ministry of deacons and they are a gift and witness to the vitality of your diocese. It's clear that you support life-long formation with programs like EFM. I was trained as an EFM mentor and have supported this process for many years. The Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania is comprised of seven convocations, which are culturally and economically diverse. Your challenges and opportunities inspire me! It would be a blessing to serve with you and learn from you as we engage God's mission as the Episcopal Church in Central Pennsylvania!

3. What challenges do you see in our profile?

The Episcopal Church adopted a corporate paradigm to meet the challenges and opportunities of the 1950's. Those challenges and opportunities have changed and are identified in your profile. Affirming the faith community as the primary place of mission, reimagining the bishop and staff as resources in support of God's mission is courageous and has long been my vision. This will take energy, attention and a willingness to work together to live into the adaptive changes you hope for in the coming years. There may be resistance to this kind of change but your desire to develop healthy and faithful churches is the place to begin. Understanding the context of each faith community and encouraging them to adopt a pattern of ministry that is sustainable, given their resources, will help initiate a conversation about the Fair Share calculation. The way to improve relationships is through a ministry of presence in parishes and convocations. The bishop and staff will need to reorient their lives to the social and administrative challenges you've identified. You've begun the difficult work of redirecting financial resources. From your profile, you are a community of hope and abundance!

4. What excites you about those challenges?

I believe we are at a moment of transformation in the Episcopal Church. We've continued to live into our Baptismal Promises, seeking to respect the dignity of every human being. In Minnesota, we supported Marriage Equality and the blessing of same gender unions, adopting a process similar to the process in Central Pennsylvania. We developed innovative patterns of ministry, which includes total or shared ministry and intentional ministry with our full communion partners. The Moravian Church has deep roots in Pennsylvania. I'm excited about exploring innovative patterns of ministry with you which may include conversations with our Lutheran and Moravian sisters and brothers. You've identified the financial challenges yet you've taken steps to redirect those resources in support of mission and ministry in the local faith community. You've indicated you'd like to have a conversation about Fair Share. We've been addressing these very issues in Minnesota. You've expressed a desire for improved communication, collaboration and cohesiveness. The opportunity to work with you in addressing these issues encourages me because our learning will benefit the whole church.

5. How do these challenges fit with your skills, experience and passions?

When I read the description of the Bishop you seek in your profile, I was moved by the Holy Spirit to offer myself. Many of the words from your profile align with my skills, experience and passions. I am a collaborative leader, whose primary responsibility is empowering other leaders; a gentle but effective administrator. I

have demonstrated experience in various sized parishes, have a passion for small congregations, and understand congregational development. I am able to lead 20 – 30 year olds into the church (they are the fast growing population at St. Luke's). I'm aware and willing to respond to changing times without fear or blaming. I am a lifelong learner with imagination and have an intelligent take on the un-churched and de-churched; a strong and humble priest, committed to daily prayer, who appreciates liturgy, a servant leader. I create and enhance an atmosphere of honesty, transparency, humility, competence, discipleship, am a leader with extraordinary energy and real stamina. I am consistent in my communication with everyone, the same all the time.

6. What is your rule of life?

I had a sense of God's call and an 'experience of the holy' at a young age. When I attended parochial schools in St. Louis, I was introduced to the life and work of Vincent de Paul, and in 2nd grade knew I wanted to live my life the way he lived his...preaching the Gospel and caring for the poor. After high school I became part of the Vincentians — The Congregation of the Mission — and was formed in a rule of life that included daily morning and evening prayer, as well as daily Eucharist. Today, my rule of life also includes spiritual direction and participating in retreat/continuing education opportunities. I pray daily Morning and Evening Prayer and Compline and meet with a spiritual advisor/companion. I have discovered this summer the gift of Celtic Spirituality and its roots in Anglicanism during a week-long leadership retreat on the Isle of Iona in Scotland. I hope to explore Celtic Spirituality in the coming years and share its insights with others

7. How would you guard the Church?

One of the many gifts in our tradition within the Christian community is our polity. We believe all the baptized are gifted and commissioned to engage God's mission and offer their gifts for the common good. All Christians are called to discernment regarding the important decisions we face and I believe bishops are called to be faithful shepherds. A bishop exercises a role of leadership and unity, articulating and interpreting the faith in every age. Part of that role requires a strong voice and includes leading us into areas which may be new and unknown. The scripture text I often use to describe this kind of ministry comes from Matthew's gospel, chapter 13 where Jesus depicts the faithful scribe as the master of the household who brings out of the storeroom what is new and what is old. My definition of a bishop's ministry in guarding the church is to help move the church into the future, discerning what is best from both the new and old.

8. Our diocese is huge and diverse. How would you be in relationship with all members of the Body?

While I understand and appreciate the pattern described in your profile, I would move away from a 'hub and spoke' model, to spend intentional time in each region or convocation. Instead of everyone coming to Harrisburg, if elected to serve as your bishop, I would spend 3 to 4 days, one week a month going out to visit in a convocation. This would be valuable time listening and getting to know the people and faith communities ... visiting with lay and ordained leaders outside of Sunday worship times. I'd make it a priority to be present in Clericus gatherings on a regular basis, engaging in Scripture reflection and listening to their concerns. Given the geography and diversity, I believe it's important for people throughout the diocese to have an opportunity to visit with the bishop in their own context, not only when there is an official occasion such as visitations, anniversaries or regional confirmations.

9. What strategies for health in family-sized parishes?

I have a number of different experiences in total, shared or collaborative ministry. Given the regional diversity in the diocese, exploring ways to engage in various expressions of total or shared ministry may be a strong possibility. Each faith community needs to understand and claim its identity and context, then consider what strategies are truly sustainable for them. This is especially so for those faith communities transitioning from the ability to financially afford full time clergy to not having that ability. Health is not premised on the ministry of a full time priest but on the parish's commitment to engage God's mission in their context with their gifts. It's important for each community to consider what kind of ministry is sustainable for them. At St. Luke's, in Rochester, we engaged in developing a "creative curacy" program with the financial support of the diocese, which involved sharing a newly ordained curate with a family-sized parish. The curacy program had many benefits including the sharing of resources and providing a mentor relationship with a "seasoned" priest.

10. 26 of our 66 parishes have full-time clergy; this number will decline this year. Overall membership has declined by 29% over the last decade. How would you work with us to create healthier parishes?

I believe part of our healthy future includes developing more intentional and sincere relationships with our full communion partners. I am committed to developing our ecumenical relationships. For example, here in Rochester, we entered into an intentional relationship with an ELCA congregation and, for a number of years, shared responsibility for middle and high school faith formation. We at St. Luke's, also became connected to a Moravian Church, in response to the Episcopal Church's initiative to come into full communion through joint

worship and pulpit exchanges. It is my experience that ecumenical relationships are most fruitful when they begin at the local level...parish to parish. I also believe healthy parishes balance a focus on attending to their inward life by way of incorporation, formation, pastoral care and worship ... while always looking outside themselves, reaching out into their neighborhoods and looking for other collaborative opportunities. I know it can be challenging to find that balance but I would encourage each parish to thrive as **they claim their identity, understand and affirm their particular context and look for outreach opportunities.**

11. What does success in ministry look like to you?

Success in ministry is primarily about a ministry of presence in every context. Success can be defined by people being visited, making sure individuals connect or stay connected to their spiritual home. Using an effective Stewardship process can help a community experience more than financial success. Success can be defined when people are invited to offer their gifts of time and talent in such a way that financial giving is not the sole focus of their effort. In my context at St. Luke's in Rochester, the ability to witness the marriage of same-gender couples is a recent example of success; particularly in the process our elected leadership used to adopt a policy for marriage for our faith community. Having an honest conversation about what is sustainable and affordable in your ministry context is a sign of success. Having a transparent and contextual compensation scale for clergy in the diocese is an example of success. Growth in persons, spirit and vitality, in witness and in participation in God's mission is a manifestation of success.

12. How would you integrate diocesan systems to serve the diocesan primary task?

I would "hit the ground listening." I believe listening is an essential component to effective leadership. I would want to hear what changes have been called for and implemented during the interim time with your provisional bishop, with every intention of honoring that good work. I've come to appreciate that I benefit from the good work of those who have come before me, rather than assuming ministry begins to happen when the new clergy person arrives. I assume the Diocesan staff has been involved in making changes to various protocols and patterns that have been in place and assessing, with the support of the provisional bishop, what protocols need to be changed. The profile indicates you have been asking tough questions and are already making tough changes collaboratively. I want to assure you I have no pre-conceived ideas about what's best for 'us' should I be elected to serve as your next bishop. I would come to live among you as one who listens and serves.