

The Rev. Canon Victoria Heard

- Questions posed by the Diocese of Southern Virginia to Bishop Candidates -

1. **Jeremiah 9:24 says, “But let those who boast boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord.” Tell us about who you understand and know God to be, and tell us how as Bishop you would call us to boast in him.**

The God of Jeremiah and the God of Christ Jesus is the One who is the Creator, who loves His creation infinitely. God’s goal is to restore humankind to relationship with God and to live in justice with each other. The cross of Christ is the culmination of the call of God for justice and the love of the Word for His fallen creatures. As a result of the Resurrection, God takes up our human life into the life of the Trinity. As the body of Christ, we are called to work our God’s continuing purpose to bring in the Kingdom.

Recently, I sat in a planetarium where the structure of the physical universe, from our local galaxy to the webbed structure of the whole known universe was laid out. That God would come to save a tiny planet in the unimaginable vastness of the universe twisted my heart to tears. How can I not boast of such a God? I would ask the people of the Diocese to claim the sense of wonder in the love of God in the vastness and beauty of creation. It may be, as Christ is said to have told Dame Julian that the whole of creation is as the quality of a hazelnut. I would encourage the people of the Diocese to take up ministries that draw us out of ourselves and into service and awe. I also would encourage practices of prayer that draw us back to contemplate the depths of God, and gives the awe that swept away Jeremiah, Isaiah and John in Revelation as they meet the eternal Christ in glory. He says that He is the Alpha and the Omega. From the first algae, to the last renewing of the universe, He is, and may we know Christ in all his redeeming works.

2. **It could be said that each order of ministry has been given gifts for the exercise of that ministry. Looking at your current priestly ministry, do you believe there are gifts you have been given that would continue to be useful to the diocese and do you see yourself as possessing a few episcopal gifts that have not yet been manifested?**

The different gifts of bishop, priest and deacon are gifts of authority and permission. The gifts of authority are clear. We reserve to bishops the authority to consecrate new bishops, in order to preserve the church’s apostolic succession and the core doctrine of the Gospel. We reserve to the presbytery the authority to offer Christ’s blessing, to pronounce God’s absolution of the penitent and to consecrate the sacrament of the Communion. We reserve to the diaconate the authority to preach the gospel and to assist and mobilize bishops and presbyters and lay people to effectively serve the world in its many needs. The deacons serve the world. The presbyters serve the local church; the bishop serves the laypeople, the deacons and the priests in their ministry. We all hunger to be encouraged and understood. God uses everything. The gifts of leadership, pastoral care and preaching that I felt before I became a deacon I still draw on. My experiences as a woman, a mother, and especially living overseas as a stranger have helped me to be an effective minister. I have worked under the leadership of good bishops and seen how the ministry of bishops can be very effective or very hurtful to the life of the diocese. I would seek to play to my strengths. I have a history of starting things. I believe in a wide circle of decision makers. I believe that prayerful, theologically aware laypersons are the principal force by which the Kingdom can be brought in. I know that God has a habit of surprising us. In Europe, my agenda was to learn to pray, but instead I found that God gave me an increase of faith. I struggled to pray past the daily office. In the past few years, I have felt myself growing in prayer, especially through the day. If I become your bishop that I pray that I do not learn bad habit, such as temporizing, making promises that I cannot keep, and saying things I do not mean.

3. How have you experienced the creative influence of the Holy Spirit in your ministry?

Some years ago, I went on a retreat to pray. While I was praying, I felt the inner voice of the Spirit tell me that I was to move a shuttered church in Commerce, Texas. German prisoners of war in World War II had built it. I argued with God. Who would believe me that I was to do such a thing? I would look like a fool. Why should the diocese expend the resources in the depth of the 2008 depression? The gentle, persistent prodding continued. I fought like a fish on the line. Finally, I gave up; I went back and pitched the project to the bishop and key laypeople. I watched God take the project, bring forward leaders at each of each stage, including, in the end, the consent of the Army Corps of Engineers. It is now the chapel of Dallas's summer camp. I sat quietly in the balcony the first week of camp and knew that I had been faithful to the creative movement of the Spirit. I heard the children singing in building that I had sweated to help figure out how to get cut into six pieces and moved eighty miles and reassembled by the lake. I had been faithful to the nudge; nudges happen, and I am always grateful.

4. Many are describing our world as post-Christian. How have you responded to this new context creatively in your ministry?

I think working in a post-Christian culture is freeing. It may have been true that the majority of people in America once were baptized Christians. It is true no longer. I grew up as a non-Christian in a cultural Christian context. What "Christian" meant when I was a child was "moral." We kept Christmas and believed that good people would go to heaven when they died. That is far from a biblical understanding of being a follower of the living Jesus. I am glad we have far fewer people joining the church to acquire respectability or get more clients in business or real estate. Still, to say that we are now a post-Christian society is to lump too many eggs in one basket. My oldest son lives on the West Coast. He has to explain and engage as a Christian in away that I do not in Texas. So the local context is important. A rural community may be different from a college campus. When I have encountered post-Christian contexts, I have responded by being cheerfully theological, and more challenging when secular people assume that I am an agent of respectable piety. And I when I speak of the Christ I have experienced, and, so far, that seems to both challenge and engage.

5. What does social justice mean to you? In the Examination of the bishop-elect the last question asked is this, "Will you be merciful to all, show compassion to the poor and strangers, and defend those who have no helper?" How might you demonstrate in your episcopate your willingness to fulfill this promise "for the sake of Jesus Christ?"

The Civil Rights Movement shapes my understanding of social justice. As a child, I was inspired by the vision of uniqueness and dignity and equality of every human laid out by Martin Luther King, Jr. Throughout most of my ministry, the Episcopal Church has been exploring the implications of the Civil Rights movement, as it extended to the African American experience, but, also later, to the experience of women, to the experience of people of color, of LGBT people, and now to immigrants. In my first parish, I removed the Confederate Battle flag from the nave of the church the day I overheard a black child ask his father "Why is that flag was in our church?" (It was a controversial act, but the flag stayed down.) I do not know specific aspects of my commitment to social justice will work out in my ministry as bishop. I know how it worked out in my ministry as canon for church planting in Dallas, where I founded, encouraged and defended new churches for immigrants and people of color and tried to defend the continued existence of historically black parishes and the hiring of priests of color. I was not always successful, but I am glad for what I did. I am currently part of a diocesan working group with the agenda to challenge the Diocese of Dallas to encounter its past history of racism and to consider steps to creatively shape a future where we, whatever our heritage,

are “judged by not by the color of our skin but by the content of our character.”

6. What do you see to be the greatest needs of today’s youth? How do you think the church must adapt in order to better meet these needs?

Which youth? I see young people living in a wide variety of contexts. In my own parish, a challenge for our youth is that the needs of their family and their own futures requires them to work weekends so they have resources to pay the bills and save for their futures. This makes a traditional Sunday school and participation in liturgical roles difficult. Six of our teens participated in an intensive diocesan weekend to begin preparation for confirmation. In our diocesan summer camp, other young people face challenges that come with having affluent families dealing with the aftermath of divorce or professional career stresses. The immigrant parishes’ youth struggle with expectations of two cultures, that of America and that of their parents and grandparents’ culture. They also are often pushed, by their better knowledge of English into an inverted role of power and responsibility with their parents. They become the interpreters for school, medical, and even legal issues. I think local parishes need to closely read the context of the youth in their parishes and of the young people in their neighborhoods. Such exegesis necessary to sensitively invite and encourage young people to find Christ’s love and the church’s guidance. I dream of revitalizing college ministry by the diocese going to more college campuses to invite young people to experience the Canterbury road.

7. Likewise, what do you see to be the greatest needs of an aging population? For example, dementia, depression, failing health, Alzheimer’s and the needs of the caregivers?

The question of “Which youth?” is also true for the aged. “Which aging population are we considering?” The challenges to an educated elderly married person with sufficient financial resources are very different than those of a retired single worker with ill health living on a Social Security check and torn between choosing re-filling medicine script or the gas tank. In general, I think the greatest need of older people is the need for a vibrant, caring community of Christians. A community creates friendships and engenders health: physical and spiritual. I see one of the particular challenges of the aged is isolation and the loss of hope, whether that is because of loss of mobility or the knowledge that one’s memory and personality are in irreversible decay. Those who are caretakers, often women, who care for the elderly are also in particular need of a supportive community and resources for respite for themselves.

8. Have you seen successful efforts in any diocese that promote a common vision for the work of that diocese as a whole entity? Have these efforts been effective in coordinating the ministries of the laity, the deacons, and the priests?

I have seen long periods in several dioceses, including Virginia, Texas, Dallas and Los Angeles, when the leadership of a bishop and or others at a diocesan level brought about meaningful change and effective ministry. Claude Payne of Texas and Peter Lee and David Jones of Virginia created cultures where new ministries were encouraged, small churches strengthened, new churches were planted and, a variety of new creative leaders, clergy and lay were raised up. I have seen dioceses like West Texas where there was collegiality and comity between the clergy and the lay leadership and new projects were accomplished. The leadership of the diocese must value competence in the diocesan staff. The bishop must oversee and support a fair and clear path for the training of new leadership, lay persons, as well as candidates for the diaconate and priesthood. The bishop must create the trust that creates a culture where people ask: “Why not?” and say, “Let’s do it!” rather than fear that when the diocese hears of an idea or ministry it will be squelched. A colleague of mine commissioned a church planter with a basket of light bulbs. Most were green, about five were yellow and only two were red. He said that an effective leader tries to hand out lots of green lights, occasionally has to say, “Slow down, be

careful,” and once in a great while, say, “Stop!” I think that is a good image for the work of a bishop.

9. Tell us how you think meaningful change occurs. How have you helped facilitate changes in the church? What principles helped guide your leadership?

Meaningful change occurs when either there is an institutional crisis that threatens the life of the institution or when there is a carefully developed deposit of trust in leadership. A good leader names a challenge that needs to be addressed, while having the good sense to not seek to change non-essentials that would create discord without deep structural transformation. I try and read the abiding customs and the deep DNA of a community. I examine and consider with prayer what is the ministry context. What is going well, how can that be strengthened? What changes are in the wider context of the ministry area? If God’s will were fully actualized in this community, what would change? What needs would be met; what gifts strengthened?

10. What are the most essential elements of the church’s evangelistic witness? How have you modeled this witness in your own life? How would you encourage the church to engage in evangelism in new ways?

The first thing needed is a lively relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Lovers talk about their true love. People excited about a movie or a restaurant that they find good, share their enthusiasm with others. How much more do people who are experiencing the love of Christ in their lives speak of the delight of having the Spirit moving in their life! Most evangelistic programs that I have seen seem to feed the existing Christians inside the church rather than be effective to inviting people to encounter Christ. Teaching, as part of discipleship, should be normative for Christians so they are comfortable about how to talk of their faith in Christ. I have taught apologetics and trained clergy and lay people in how to be more comfortable about sharing their faith. First of all, we need to pray for sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit and a resolute respect for the dignity of those we meet. Evangelism is a work of the Holy Spirit in which Christians are privileged to be involved. Most conversions to Christ grow slowly. Sudden Road to Damascus conversions are rare. It will hold us in good stead to have a humble understanding that one may be one witness of several along another’s spiritual journey of years. I have tried to create not only in the two dioceses I have served a culture of evangelism and church planting. I have had the privilege of being a witness in some people’s conversions, and that is as it should be. I have been watching the claims of some very creative people with social media and in the Fresh Expression movement but I continue to believe that primary evangelism remains the work of “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread” as one missionary put it years ago.

11. As Bishop how would you nourish and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries to encourage diocesan outreach efforts?

As I mentioned above, I would use my metaphorical basket of green lights, yellow lights and two or three red ones. I would, as I have seen other bishops do, shape the diocesan budget so there is some means to support new creative ideas. I know a priest in Georgia who started a parish with \$6000, which he admits that his bishop gave him largely to get him out of his office. I know of a deacon in Los Angeles who started a replicable ministry to the homeless called Laundry Love with nothing much more than laundry powder and a Suffragan bishop’s blessing. Good ideas need to be encouraged. Any diocese can set aside for grass roots funds emanations of the Spirit moving among the churches. The money follow the vision to move in faith.

12. Why should the church struggle to be more diverse? What equips you help the church effectively deal with the challenges of becoming more diverse?

The Kingdom of God is that which John sees in Revelation 7:9 with “every people, tribe and nation,” gathered before the throne of God. The universal church is a poly-chrome tapestry of all peoples and all cultures. We are enriched by the effects of bringing the creativity and gifts of different cultures to the service and celebration of the Gospel. Consider how Christmas has been shaped by the cultures of many different countries: the trees came from Germany, the timing from the Roman Saturnalia, the carols from around the world.... how blessed we are by Bach and by African American gospel songs and Taize chant! I have found that it is necessary to keeping the risen Christ central as we work the ministry of our diversity. The alternative is being seduced by the lifting up of differences for difference sake. Differences are hard to welcome when there is a wide gap of culture. Koreans love kimchi but usually understand that other people will not like how it smells. People of European background may never feel comfortable with drumming during communion, nor dancing in the aisles, but our African immigrant members find that freeing. Christians have to know how to welcome the wider experience of church while not seeking to impose nor extol a singular custom. It was wrong to do when European cultures were colonizing; it is wrong now. Local parishes can and should vary widely in liturgical and cultural expressions. High and low, Korean and West African, Virginia traditional and jazz mass – all are welcome at the table of Christ. When the diocese gathers, it is important to share such diversities, but to remember that it is Christ who is our center – He alone will bring us all into one Kingdom, where we all find our own cultural home. “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

13. As you have been discerning God’s call in this process, have you received any insight into what you might like to focus your attention upon during the first few months of your episcopate in the Diocese of Southern Virginia?

My first priority would be to get to know the clergy and leadership of the diocese by visiting the different areas and cities of the diocese and asking them to share their experience and hopes for their own ministry content and for the diocese. I would stay for a week at a time in different parts of the diocese, and meet with clergy and convocation leaders. I would be listening for common themes and concerns. My goal would be to cover every area of the diocese in the first six months. I would also visit and try and understand the major ministries of the diocese such as Camp Chanco, the Cursillo community, the ministries to prisons and the schools of the diocese. I would also set up, with staff help, a visitation schedule that would take me to every parish in the diocese in as close to one calendar year as possible. One cannot lead a community that one does not know. Therefore, such a walkabout would be my first priority. Within the first year, I would also be looking to raise money to find more effective ways to reach teens and young adults.