What is it about the Diocese of Alabama that encourages you to enter discernment for our next bishop?

The key phrase in this question is “our next bishop.” I am not entering discernment to be a bishop; I am entering discernment to be your bishop. The Diocese of Alabama and I are deeply connected. I was baptized, confirmed, ordained, and married surrounded by the stain glass windows of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Decatur. I learned how to live as a disciple of Christ on Summer Staff at Camp McDowell. I first heard God calling me to the priesthood during a Vocare retreat within Stough Lodge. I spent my formative years as a priest being shaped in parishes within the Diocese. Though I haven’t lived in Alabama since 2012, I still consider the Diocese of Alabama to be my spiritual home.

I hold within me the experiences of who the Diocese of Alabama has been, but also who it could become. I believe the Diocese of Alabama is being called to be a voice of the Jesus Movement in a state that desperately needs to hear its message. And, I think the voices of this movement are being formed at this very moment. The Diocese of Alabama’s ongoing commitment to the formation of young people through parish youth ministry, the Youth Department, Camp McDowell, Sawyerville, and campus ministry is especially encouraging. Even though the Diocese has offered these ministries for quite some time, none of them are stagnant. They instead continue reinventing themselves to stave off irrelevancy.

Diocesan Youth Ministers meetings breathe new life into often overworked and underpaid youth ministers, who then share their learnings with their youth. The same youth lead Happening retreats and Sawyerville Camps, where relationships with God and one another are further strengthened. And when these teenagers leave home for college, they are met with chaplains who welcome their questions, developing faith, and commitment to truly being the church rather than simply doing church.

I would love to see the bishop’s staff and churches within the Diocese of Alabama discern additional ways beyond ordained ministry to listen to and
create leadership opportunities the young adults who have been formed through these many ministries.

The current generation of young adults craves a church who will take their commitment to living as the Body of Christ as seriously as their campus ministries. They cherish our Episcopal tradition, but are cautious of traditionalism. They are hopeful about what the future might hold, rather than hindered by experiences of decades’ past. I am encouraged by the space made for these young adults as year-round staff members at Camp McDowell and by their role in the Poor People’s Campaign in Montgomery and Washington, D.C. last year. The Diocese of Alabama is in a unique position to lead the Episcopal Church in offering additional opportunities for young adults to serve the Church due to its successful and vibrant history of faith formation.

**What in your vocation and spiritual journey led you to enter discernment to be a bishop in the church?**

God knit me together in my mother’s womb to preach Jesus’ gospel of unrelenting love. I’ve spent the duration of my adult life preaching, teaching, and striving to embody Jesus’ commandments to love God and our neighbor. This incarnate love of God, neighbor, and self shapes my identity as a person, a parent, a partner, and a priest. Through the promises made at my baptism, I feel it’s my moral and spiritual responsibility to bring the fullness of God’s creation to all people right now.

I feel like the state and the Diocese are at a pivotal point in history. The profile for the Twelfth Bishop of Alabama mentions the tension in Alabama’s past and present when it comes to civil and human rights. It names the occasions when bishops have stepped out of Carpenter House and into the public square, sharing Christ’s radically inclusive message with the wider world. I believe a critical ministry of the next Bishop of Alabama is empowering and equipping members of the diocese to live into Jesus’ command to love beyond our church walls.

Too much of Christianity today focuses on personal salvation, piety, and public appearance. As a truth-teller and gospel-seeker, I am passionate about sharing the truth of God’s justice and peace for all people. As my
spiritual journey progresses, I’ve grown more convicted to not only share
God’s truth, but to educate and empower others to do the same. I’m called
to echo Christ’s plea to remember the poor, welcome the outliers, and
choose compassion over religious law.

I’ve lived into this calling through a diverse vocational path including
national, diocesan and local ministries. As Executive Director of Episcopal
Peace Fellowship, I facilitated workshops and retreats for young adults,
vestries, and diocesan conventions. I created liturgical and educational
resources used by churches throughout the Episcopal Church, and worked
with bishops on national campaigns, public witness actions, and Episcopal
legislation.

Presently, I serve as the editor of Grow Christians, a ministry of Forward
Movement that strives to equip adults with the resources they need to
better foster the faith of children. What started an Episcopal parenting blog
has evolved into a community of parents, grandparents, godparents, clergy,
and Christian educators all dedicated to educating and nurturing the next
generation of Episcopal leaders.

My work with the Diocese of Alabama’s Commission on Ministry prepared
me to step into the role of co-directing the Diocese of Virginia’s Young
Priest Initiative. I walked with college students as they discerned where
God was calling them to serve, and wrestled with the difficult, honest
questions that young adults so often ask.

And locally, my role as a parish priest provides ample opportunity to be
both pastor and prophetic preacher. Whether serving a resource sized
church in Virginia, program sized churches in Alabama or a family sized
church in suburban Texas, I preach God’s truth through love.

What do you think will be the most important thing for you to do in
your first year as bishop?

The most important thing I’ve done in the first year of all my parochial and
non-parochial positions has been showing up and listening, and I would
expect the same to be true for the first year as a bishop. I have found that
spending the first year of a new call developing relationships provides a
foundation that strengthens the ministry we will carry out together in the years that follow. In my current setting I spent my first six months listening to parishioners while sipping coffee, sharing meals, and walking around the church neighborhood. Through these conversations and prayers, I learned about their histories, their hopes for the church’s future, and a myriad of other things they felt I should know. Should I be called to serve as your bishop, I would show up and listen in as many settings as possible from meetings with the Camp Department to the Youth Department, from Cursillo to Episcopal Place.

As a priest in Christ’s church, I understand my vocation to be one of growing faith and discipleship of those in my care. Growth is often accompanied by pain, no matter where it occurs in life. Laying this foundational relationship with parishioners has allowed me the opportunity to encourage this growth and deepening of their faith. I preach to them on Sundays only after praying with them in hospital rooms, distributing food, and studying scripture with them during the week. Parishioners are more receptive to challenging sermons after I have engaged in meaningful moments of pastoral care during the week. They understand that I always preach from a foundation built on love and grace.

What are 3 significant issues confronting humanity and what is the church’s role in addressing these issues?

First, the most serious issue confronting humanity is the inability to see all persons as being created in the image of God. We live in a polarized world where it’s easy to neglect the dignity of other people rather than respect it. When we fail to see others as fellow members of the Body of Christ, it becomes easier to vilify them. When we fail to see the image of God in others, they are easier to ban from seeking asylum, easier to arrest, easier to abuse, easier to reject and neglect. The Church must set the example of honoring every human life. We must not attack or oppress fellow members of the Body of Christ. We must instead welcome them into the Kingdom of God, into our communities and churches. When churches see institutions or individuals neglecting the dignity of another person, we must align ourselves with the latter because that’s where Jesus will be.
Second, I think Americans have lost their ability to engage in civil discourse and this affects every single aspect of our humanity. We have grown into a binary people who approach all discussions as either being either right or wrong. We must relearn that whether or not we agree with what is being said, we will respect the person speaking and walk away with a deeper understanding of the particular issue. Civil discourse is mutually advantageous, but it takes practice and patience to employ. I found the way Bishops Andrus and Parsley disagreed over the election of Bishop Robinson in 2003 profoundly helpful to members of the Diocese of Alabama. Though they voted differently and publicly disagreed with one another, they remained in relationship and conversation. In doing so, they set an example for the rest of the Diocese.

Third, our country’s perpetuation of a white supremecist culture is crippling humanity. Our family moved away from a neighboring town of Charlottesville, Virginia just one week before the Unite the Right rally in 2017. The magnitude of violence and vitriol of that weekend alarmed me for many reasons including the discovery that a white nationalist movement still existed in the United States. This rally woke me out of a stupor of privilege, and led me to deepen my understanding of race in this country and the ways I implicitly support our racist culture through books, podcasts, and community forums.

For far too long Alabamians have ignored conversations on racism, white supremacy, and implicit biases. For far too long we’ve rewritten our state’s history and our present personal prejudices. We cannot remain oblivious to the sins committed against people of color. The Diocese of Alabama has the opportunity to lead the rest of the state in finally addressing this issue that’s as central to our existence as the red clay and rich black soil found beneath our churches. Our churches can offer opportunities for dialogue, book studies, and educational offerings to remove the stigma of race, and finally work towards a just future for all people.