

The Reverend Dr. Glenda Curry

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

As the profile reveals, the future of our Diocese is strong and bright! The diversity of ministries, faithfulness and energy of the people suggests health and opportunity. Life-long formation, outreach and mission, along with creative camp ministries offer countless possibilities for all God's people. We identify ourselves as beloved children of God, redeemed and transformed by God's grace through Jesus Christ. That says our people know the source of their inspiration and hope. They are eager to share the love of Jesus with the world. The spirit of the Diocese attracts me.

We offer and accomplish many wonderful things already, but I think our future ministry would only even better if we developed a vision and clear plan for building on the good things and responding to our most pressing challenges. I believe we can organize in ways that will honor our rich history of ministry, while articulating a vision for the future to keep the Body of Christ in Alabama vibrant and relevant for people of all ages. Offering my energy, gifts, talents, and experience in leading large systems, for use responding to challenges and designing the future, says my spirit will grow. That feels like God.

Obviously, I am, after thirty years of lay/ordained service, deeply invested in and love the Diocese. My imagination is fired when I consider working to clarify our priorities, help our small churches, articulate our educational paths, create new worship expressions, and reach new generations. I believe there are creative, innovative ways to resolve tensions and bring healing to our relationships with each other.

I entered discernment because our profile was openly honest about the challenges, hopes of the people, and desired attributes of the next bishop. I know firsthand our church has enormous strength, energy, and devotion. We can meet challenges in creative and inclusive ways because we love each other and God's work.

I entered because I think my leadership style and gifts/talents closely match those desired attributes for the next bishop. These gifts have helped me successfully lead in several secular positions over the years. The same attributes were critically important at Epiphany Leeds for a time, and at All Saints in Birmingham for the past fifteen years. They are a natural part of my style of leadership in mission and ministry.

I have prayerfully contemplated this over the past three months, both with individuals and in a discernment group. After reading the profile, I am convinced that my particular vocational experiences and my God-given gifts have uniquely formed and prepared me to offer mature, tested leadership, and relevant experience for the ministry of bishop in Alabama. I believe God is calling me to take the next steps. Hopefully, with God's help, serving in such a capacity would help the Diocese and church I love to move into a new, even richer future. With God's help, I am prepared to work with the committee in any way to approach next steps.

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

My great aunt bought me a new dress and I went to church at age five. My parents avoided church except on Girl Scout Sunday. A friend's invitation to a Baptist church led to my baptism at age 16. On youth Sunday, I preached, so call to priesthood was beginning. On Christmas Eve at Trinity Cathedral in college, liturgy captured me. The Episcopal way offered acceptance, tolerance, and challenge.

College prepared me to practice nursing. At age 24, I became Director of Nursing of a large nursing home. The youngest of a racially diverse staff of 130, one of fourteen white members, I led by example, fairness, predictability and honesty fostered teamwork. People said I had natural leadership gifts.

A doctoral degree meant a new job in a University. Spiritually, I joined a new mission in Oklahoma and saw a church formed from the ground up. My marriage ended. A post-doctoral fellowship award led me to UAB in academic administration. Home was St. Stephen's, Peter Horn and Doug

Carpenter my spiritual guides. My secular and spiritual vocation were merging with my call.

A new Dean of Nursing job led to an even more complex role as President of a campus of Troy University. I found St John's, and Robert Wisnewski as spiritual director. Work at Troy Montgomery was complex, intense, rewarding. Countless lessons refined my skills. Management of priorities, declining resources, work/life balance, difficult people, legal issues, fundraising, financial management, vision and planning underpinned everything.

Establishing the Rosa Parks museum for Mrs. Parks there involved work with the AME church and many Civil Rights local/national leaders. My call quickened as I remarried and moved to Sewanee.

Serving both at Epiphany-Leeds, and All Saints, my secular experience merged with priesthood. I learned how to lead in a different world, a new way. My prayer life deepened in Sursum Corda. Eugene Peterson's work taught me to lead by "Praying, Preaching and Listening", opening me regularly to God's help. Together, the rector and the parish flourished with this approach.

I believe leadership is the management of hope. God supplies the guidance and vision as revealed through the people. Clear, fair decisions, consistent, honest, predictable leadership supports a culture of love and trust, wonderful transformation can happen.

My time at both parishes was extraordinary. At Epiphany, we refined a vision and raised resources to build a nave. At All Saints, we created a long-term direction using vision, planning, leadership recruitment, stewardship and education. We managed amazing growth and established stability.

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

I think the most important thing I can do during my first year as bishop is to meet, listen and try to learn from the people in parishes and worshipping

communities, serving on committees/departments and/or staff in the ministries. Although I am already aware of and acquainted with many ministries and people, my intention is to enter into this time open and willing to entertain new information, perspectives and voices.

My knowledge of how the Diocese functions up until now, has come from outside the systems. I want to understand the functioning of the systems in the Diocese responsible for day to day operations, policy, and decision-making, from a different vantage point. I would also want to carefully understand the challenges described in the profile from all sides and begin to develop responses. I have no doubt that I have much to learn about both the role of bishop and of bishop coadjutor.

I would like to take advantage of the first six months working with Bishop Sloan to try and learn the history of policies and practices locally and understand our role in the national church. Of course my understanding would include finance and shared stewardship, formational, missional, resource and camp ministries. Once installed, I would concentrate on initiating necessary steps to develop a vision for the next five years, culminating in a strategic plan for our Diocese. That process would involve a wide variety of input from all interested and invested parties.

My approach will be to include as many viewpoints as possible, and consider a wide range of opinions. I would work with the existing decision-making frameworks and include other ways to seek endorsement and investment in planning and gathering information. I believe there is value in thinking “out of the box” but also in considering experience and tradition. There are many extraordinarily creative and faithful ordained and lay persons in our midst who can and should be included. Our greatest resource is our people and I would consistently value their ideas, opinions and prayers.

Any vision or plan is only as helpful as the quality of ownership it attracts. I believe we can develop a collaborative, relevant, useful and exciting plan that builds on our strengths, reflects our hopes and dreams while addressing our challenges. The bishop should be accountable for communicating the final vision and plan to the Diocese.

In the middle of all my own ideas of what I would do, I would leave room for God to lead and act. We have offered our profile as a place from which to begin. I would expect surprises and opportunities, as well as adjustments. I will aim to trust God to send grace and insight, the Holy Spirit and abundant love to help us all discover our priorities and when necessary, help us find the path that best reveals God's kingdom and the way of Jesus.

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

Three significant issues confronting humanity are hatred, poverty and care of creation. These extend across cultural, racial, sexual, social and national boundaries touching people all over the world.

Hatred is expressed in oppression, injustice, isolation, rejection, bigotry, discrimination, indifference, dishonesty, neglect, abuse and violence. Scripture says such hatred was common in Jesus' day. The more subtle forms now extend into our communications via internet, print and social media networks bombarding us with voices that dehumanize, disrespect, distort and dismiss the image of God in each person. The Church has life-saving, life-giving help to offer a hurting world.

The Gospel of love Jesus preached is the only enduring answer for a world lost in hatred. In this, the Church is obligated to lead all efforts. Following the example of Jesus, teaching forgiveness, advocating and offering equality, reaching out to marginalized, caring for children and youth, LGBTQ communities, women, those in prison, are all essential.

Working to find new and creative ways to reach the unchurched, evangelism, our missional ministries, supporting ways to promote racial reconciliation and our Diocesan partnerships, are all necessary.

Poverty expressed spiritually, physically, intellectually and emotionally is widespread and seemingly intractable. While many of us in the western world may be able to isolate ourselves from the reality of physical poverty, even we cannot escape forms of spiritual and intellectual scarcity. Lack of shelter, water, resources for adequate health care, and sufficient food,

mandate the Church respond rigorously. Lack of education fostering cultural ignorance, lack of job and living skills, socialization, lack of proper care for the limited and differently-abled all stem from poverty. Spiritual poverty expressed in lack of compassion and love, addiction, mental illness, hopelessness and loneliness erode our society in material-rich parts of the world.

In response to poverty, the Diocese and the Church provides ministries providing health care to underserved, building and providing housing to the homeless, care for those with dementia, the aged and orphans, camp ministries, to mention a few. We should look for ways to spread these ministries.

Finally, a response to the lack of care for the land, water, air and creatures God created and entrusted into our care is mandated by scripture. The Diocese offers a wonderful model in Camp McDowell, the stewardship of creation in parishes, and in missional work, disaster relief, outdoor worship, and teaching/preaching ministries.

Our baptismal promises give a framework for an ethical life regularly recited in worship. Using these promises the Church can embody our moral responsibility in all three problem areas selected. Continuing in the apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers, resisting evil, repentance, respecting the dignity of every human being, seeking and serving Christ in all people, loving our neighbor, striving for justice and peace, means that our worship does shape our living.

Finally, our presiding Bishop, has given us the way of love and being part of the Jesus movement will empower the Church to embrace our responsibility to bring love into hatred, poverty and lack of care for creation.