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Candidate Questions
Diocese of Pittsburgh

1. What are the greatest challenges to the spread of the gospel in the United States today?

Discipleship and Formation. The character of Christians, our humility, charity, and hope are some of the best witnesses to the person of Jesus Christ alive within us. As a jaded and cynical 19-year old, I was first attracted to the faith by a Christian believer who was simply mirthful. I saw a joyfulness that was compelling. That is often not what many people see or think about when they encounter Christians today.

People were attracted to the first-century Christians because they behaved differently - in a good way. We need to behave differently - in a good way. I am alarmed at how fearful, angry, and judgemental Christians are perceived to be, not without cause, in our culture. I think that perception to be an impediment to the spread of the gospel. Bad behavior in family interactions, church relationships, sometimes on social media, by people proudly stating they are Christians seems to be in contrast to the character that attracted people in the New Testament. It is in contrast to what attracted me. It is exactly what I DON'T want to be like. I take these to be discipleship and formation issues.

Our bad reputation with the "secular" world is, in part, our fault. True Christian formation will challenge our character flaws, not just our mistaken theology. St. Paul's letters clearly do both of these things. Typically teaching the theological truth up front, he then always pivots on a "therefore" to correct our unruly and uncharitable behavior. His letters to the Corinthians are perhaps the best examples of this.

Formation must include theological integration with Biblical literacy. I think in many cases the latter is accomplished but not the former - the kind of formation that helps people understand why it is we believe what we believe, not just that we believe it - the diocesan profile names this as "digesting the Scriptures". We know what the bible says but we have little language to explain to people why it makes sense, at least to us. So it eventually ceases to make sense - even to us. We then experience theological drift and an erosion of faith. This is a plea for a recovery of apologetics - not so much to convince others but to solidify ourselves.

I think we also need to appeal to Jesus' method of formation and discipleship. He walked with 12, but more particularly Peter, James and John, for three years. Eating with them, resting with them, going to weddings with them, teaching them formally, teaching them informally as they lived lives together. And it produced, with the work of the Holy Spirit, people who eventually changed the course of history. This is in sharp contrast to a 6-week onramp program that is the heart of many churches' discipleship plan. Programs, while they have a place, are not discipleship. We need them. But we need

more than them. Discipleship is more personal and more costly. It takes more time. The problem with Jesus' method is it is inefficient and not easily scalable. Efficiency and scalability are business virtues, not biblical ones.

2. As you look back on your ordained ministry, describe one or two highlights where you saw the advance of the gospel or the growth of the church. What was your role in this?

Planting a church is one. A small group of spiritual refugees from the Episcopal church had already started gathering in Vermont where I was living in the mid 2000s. I agreed to come alongside them to help them discern whether God was calling them to plant a church. I had never even thought about planting a church. The Anglican/Episcopal world that I came from was all about existing (often dying) congregations, not starting new ones. I didn't know anything about planting a church, but I did know how to work with people to help them to listen to God. This is the fruit of my work counselling and as a spiritual director. What began as a group of 20 aging ex-Episcopalians, became over the course of 5 years a congregation of 60 to 70 that included those people, as well as university students, young families, and a number of campus ministers. I certainly provided direction, and taught, and preached, but mostly worked to release the gifts of others. As I was still working full-time at GE, I did not have the capacity to preach every week so I trained and equipped 10 lay-preachers, men and women, to share that load. That work was perhaps not growth in the sense of people in pews, but it was growth in the equipping of the saints. That work has continued to bless that congregation and others as those people have moved elsewhere in the country.

One story, that is more focussed on personal discipleship, is also indicative of how I have seen the advance of the gospel through my ministry. One of our church members at this plant was dating a man who was not yet a believer. He was open to the gospel but from a very secular background. He and I met on a regular basis. I suggested he read Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. He diligently read this and came to our lunch meetings with questions, objections, and points of confusion. Those conversations involved careful listening, which, by the way, I regard as a superpower, and some apologetics work. One day he asked me about communion, why it was important and why he was not permitted to receive. I expect I responded to him with some sacramental theology, but also with the statement that to come to the table, to receive the bread and the wine is to submit our selves, our souls and bodies as living sacrifices. To come to receive is to say "yes" to Jesus. The next Sunday, he came to communion, and extended his hands. That extension of his hands was his conversion moment. Probably the most "Anglican" conversion I have ever witnessed. And only three people in that room understood what was happening: him, me, and his then girlfriend, now wife. They are now faithfully attending and serving in an Anglican congregation in Florida.

3. What modern or historical (non-biblical) figure do you view as an inspiration or example for their leadership? Please share an example of how this influenced your own ministry.

Someone who is likely unknown to any who read this, but whose life and ministry have shaped and formed mine and my wife's. Vina Sweetman was a lay woman to whom God gave a particular charism of healing in the form of pastoral counselling. At the urging of friends and people who had already benefited from her counsel and prayer in informal ways, she established the Isaiah Forty Foundation in Montreal in 1991 as "a venture in Christian counselling." Thirty years later that counselling center is a well-known and valued resource in the Montreal Christian community.

I had known Vina in passing, from a stint working with vacation bible schools that she had been running in the late 80s. After I had moved to Montreal and was experiencing a season of depression, I went to her as a counsellor. It was the best counselling that I have ever experienced because it integrated the best of psychology with the faith-filled expectation that Jesus was present in the process. My association went from client to conference team member, to counsellor, to vice-president of the Board and ultimately President and CEO.

Vina taught me by modelling the Christian life and challenging me. I learned from her a faith that believes that Jesus' decision for us is infinitely more important than our decision for him - as critical as that is in our lives. She modelled and taught that Jesus is actually King. She had little patience for the fretting she heard from Christians about the world and the church "going to hell in a handbasket". As if Jesus were not sovereign. She taught, by word and example, that though I may be in a rush to resolve my issues, or accomplish this goal or that, Jesus is not. "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion for the day of Christ Jesus." I notice who is the agent and the actor in that sentence. All these things became real to me as I observed and listened. It really is Jesus who saves.

She taught me the power of the Holy Spirit to heal and transform. I learned to move in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but not in a flashy, sensational way. I learned it doesn't have to be loud or showy to be effective and powerful. It was Holy Spirit power, decently and in order.

She taught me and challenged me to courage. On many occasions in both private and public controversies she would say, "Alex, if you don't say something, who will?"

She disciplined me and my wife Tamara for twenty years. There is no substitute for personal discipleship over time. And she left a deposit that we are seeking to leave in others as we disciple them. I imitated her as she imitated Christ.

4. Based on what you read in the diocesan profile and bishop's profile, what skills, gifts, or characteristics would you expect to bring to the role of bishop?

I read of real hurts and wounds that exist from multiple corporate experiences: the separation from the Episcopal Church, the challenges of being the Archbishop's Diocese, and even the mixed experiences with Bishop Jim Hobby. That is a lot in a short period of time. Healing and wholeness, forgiveness and reconciliation is the very core of the work I do at Isaiah Forty - helping people, and sometimes whole communities unearth the riches of the work of Jesus to heal these very things. One of the things that most motivates me is the opportunity to help in the healing of hurts and wounds. It is my jam.

Your profile also says that you have a need to rebuild a sense of togetherness and common cause, and to articulate a new vision for your own future. I feel particularly equipped for work like this. I have been leading the ministry of which I am President through these processes over the past number of years. While the ministry began in Canada in the early 90s, since I have taken over we have created a legal presence also in the United States - with a Board of Directors needed in each country. I have led those Boards through a common visioning process to clarify our mission and purpose and to create structures in which we can function as a single Board, even though we need to be two legally speaking. This involved a lot of listening, framing, and reframing. It involved getting outside assistance to help us clarify. It has been a fantastic experience, the fruit of which we are just beginning to experience.

In reading your Bishop's profile I would honestly state that I am many, but not all of those things. I will make mention of a few.

I am genuine, frank, and warm, but also straddling the introvert/extrovert line. I am not always quick to talk in a new situation. That has plusses and minuses. Some can initially experience me as quiet (a minus perhaps) but it gives me opportunity to listen first (a plus).

You are looking for a bishop gifted in pastoral care and oversight. My first passion is the pastoral care and support of leaders - both clergy and lay. If our leaders are spiritually and emotionally healthy, our churches will be and we will see fruit. This has been the central focus of my ministry work over the past ten or more years.

I love to communicate vision and mission. But I am convinced that the sense of vision and mission comes forth from the Holy Spirit in collaboration with the community. As we see and understand who we are, and the Lord's giftings in us, our vision and mission become clearer. I am not a "Here's where we are going, get behind me" kind of visionary leader.

I am an able administrator. I have had to be running a non-profit in two countries and also working for GE. But administration is not what I first run to. I would be looking for the right team so that some of this might be done by others.

5. Briefly articulate your position on women and holy orders, specifically women serving as deacons, priests and rectors.

I see ordination as the articulation of the discernment, by the church, of a particular charism of leadership in a person. The sex of the person, while not unimportant or incidental, has nothing to do with the charism of leadership. I believe that women, as well as men, are called into the leadership of the church. Women, therefore, will be called to priestly ministry as well as the leading (rectorship) of congregations. I am supportive of ordaining women to the presbyterate and appointing them as rectors.

We can, and should, expect that women will bring different strengths and emphases to the work of leadership than men will. This I take to be an advantage and benefit for the life of the church.

I also appreciate the work and effort that has been taken by the House of Bishops and the task force that considered this issue for us. I am thankful for their conclusions - that a coherent biblical case can be made for both perspectives on this - even though that leaves us with the very hard work of managing the tensions we feel with each other. I think it critical that we engage and treat our brothers and sisters with differing views on this with honor and respect as we manage those tensions.

6. The Diocese of Pittsburgh has a diverse range of congregations. Please articulate the different needs between urban, city, suburban, and rural churches in a Revelation 7 context.

There are two things that I see in Revelation 7 that speak into this question. First is the enumeration of those sealed from the twelve tribes of Judah - twelve thousand from each. In St. John's vision, each tribe is equally represented around the throne. Yet in the history of Israel, not all tribes have the same influence or esteem. The tribe and ultimately the kingdom of Judah is the heavy hitter, from which the Davidic kingdom comes. Some are historically more significant and important; some are small and of little note. This, I think, is true of the diversity of congregations in any diocese. Smaller congregations, be they rural or inner city, may seem to be of less significance in our eyes. They are not so in the kingdom. This truth is reflected in Anglican polity in that all congregations frequently have the same representation at a Synod. This is a reflection of this Revelation 7 context.

Second is the worship of the host of heaven around the throne in their diversity. I have had the privilege of attending two GAFCON conferences. There I saw a foretaste of Revelation 7 - of the gathering of every tribe, tongue and nation. The cultural and racial

diversity of the church was incarnate in that environment. There we experienced a unity, particularly of worship, that is brought back to me every time I read Revelation 7. That unity, however, was not without tensions. The church, globally, is culturally and racially diverse. As is the church locally. One of the strengths of Anglicanism is that it gathers diverse church cultures globally but also locally, in a Diocese. The focus, needs, and challenges of the Kenyan Church are different than those of the American Church. The same can be said of urban and rural churches, and even different churches within one urban context. They each have their own culture. The Communion gathers them physically and spiritually on a global level. A Diocese does the same thing locally. While we might easily speak statistically of the challenges of rural, city, or suburban churches as a whole, statistics are generalizations. Congregations are unique instances. Their needs, gifts, and challenges are best discovered in their particularity, not in the general.

I am currently living and ministering in Chicago. The congregations that I have most interaction with are city parishes, each different and distinct. One is urban, made up of younger, reasonably affluent professionals. Another is more working class, and more racially- and age-diverse. Each of these have particular expressions of the gospel and distinct needs and desires in their work and mission. Each needs different kinds of encouragement and challenge as they do the work that God has given them to do. There are two “cultures” here. And these are just two city parishes.

Bridging cultural gaps is not easy. Age and generational differences make this hard. I have seen this first hand. In this we experience conflict. Drawing diverse cultures will generate conflict. But in the conflict there are opportunities to love, to submit to one another out of reverence to Christ.

The resolution of the conflict is not found in becoming culturally monolithic or homogenous. It is found, I think, in the vision of Revelation 7, that we all come together in common worship, common prayer. Cultural distinctiveness is retained, and returned to. Yet we gather in unity because we worship One Lord.