

September 1, 2022

Dear Members of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland Search Committee,

I am deeply honored to be nominated for consideration as your next bishop. I immediately felt drawn to the Diocese of Maryland when we began discussions in 2017 to launch The College for Congregational Development in the diocese. Maryland is a long way from where I live on the West Coast and yet I have been intrigued since those first meetings with the ways in which my skill set and heart for ministry fit with the character and challenges of your diocese. It is evident from your profile, and from my experience with you at The College, that the churches in this diocese love God and each other and that you do so in the face of some real differences that exist among you. It is also evident to me that your churches long to grow, and to invite more people into our Episcopal way of following Jesus in community. Your desire to be a place where new expressions of church can thrive and grow in concert with the equally creative work of sustaining and deepening the wells of tradition that anchor us together in God is so exciting to me. I engage in this same sort of work within my current context as canon and parish priest, and I long to continue it in new ways and in a new context as your bishop.

As drawn as I am to your many strengths, I am even more compelled by the challenges you describe in your profile. Your willingness to continue the good work that has already begun around racial justice and reconciliation touches my heart and is a labor I also feel deeply called to. I am heartened by the naming of trust development as one of the capacities your diocese wants to work on, and as a leader who prioritizes collaboration and openness, this is a challenge I am ready to dive into, with you.

I describe myself as a developer-priest, and I believe God is calling me to explore becoming a developer-bishop. I believe that any congregation, of any size, can be developed to be more faithful, more healthy, and more effective as a local expression of the Body of Christ. This includes congregations that are thriving as well as those in need of new energy, new ideas, and new life after times of struggle. In my work with scores of congregations across our church as a trainer, consultant, and Canon, I have helped congregations of all sizes and diverse locations discover their unique identities and engage in the hard work of developing more healthy and effective communities of faith. As your Bishop, I would leverage this experience and skill set for the congregations of Maryland, working with you to sustain and nourish clergy and lay folk for the purpose of helping each congregation discern and communicate their unique purpose, and working to equip them with the tools to live into that purpose with confidence and vitality.

In my current congregation I have worked on congregational development in two particular passion areas of mine: Child Theology and multicultural community building. Child Theology is a theological exploration and practice that wonders what it might be like to center our theological discourse and all that flows from it on the spirituality and sacred experiences of children, who are arguably the most vulnerable, least powerful demographic of human beings on our planet. Multicultural community, in my current context, means learning how to make room in our faith community for people

from diverse countries and economic backgrounds, and to truly begin to identify as a church with many cultures, races, and ages fully participating. In my eight years at St. Columba's we grew over 40% in Average Sunday attendance, increased our pledges by over 82%, increased enrollment in our children and youth ministries from 3 to over 50, and moved from less than 2% people of color to almost 20% of our membership being people of color, most of whom are immigrant, refugee, or asylum seeking families from the continent of Africa. We are learning together how to be in community as a church with people who speak different languages, hold different political opinions, and are not always comfortable or familiar to one another. Together we have been exploring the idea that church is not only a place to be comfortable, loved and known (though it is a place for this!), it is also somewhere we come to be discomfited and to learn how to be in community with people who are not all that similar to us. This has been some of the most rewarding work I have ever done. I am eager to work in a larger system to equip more congregations for this work.

My role as Canon for Congregational Development in the Diocese of Olympia has provided me with years of experience working in an executive capacity on the diocesan level – serving our congregations of all sizes through direct consultation, the development of training programs, conflict interventions, and being a primary guide for search and profile committees as they do the tender work of discernment. I played a key role in diocesan responses to the pandemic, bringing what I was learning as a parish priest into the specific ways our staff responded to assist clergy and congregations in coping with the shutdown and other challenges of 2020 and 2021. I believe my unique experience of working simultaneously as a Canon as well as a Vicar has particularly prepared me for the role of bishop – which requires a heart for all the churches of the diocese as well as the capacity to imagine and respond to the unique challenges of each individual place, to respond and support as each congregation moves toward the future God is preparing uniquely for them.

I trust the future the Spirit has in mind for The Diocese of Maryland in this process. I am already blessed to have participated, and I thank you for the invitation and opportunity. Please know that you are daily in my prayers and on my heart.

With care and gratitude,

Alissa+