

4 September 2022

Dear Members of the Search Committee:

It has been said that discerning a sense of call to the episcopate is about both vocation and location. Both seem crucial to me.

I have been hearing, questioning, praying about, and fighting with a sense of call to the episcopate for years now. Ten years ago a mentor placed my name in a bishop search. I wasn't elected, yet I learned and I grew.

When I work with folks in the ordination process I am always eager to hear them describe their sense of call, who Jesus is to them, and how God has shown up. I also want to hear how the community has affirmed their call, or not, what people say to them about that call, and whether or not they can see them in the role. Many have come up to me since that earlier election to suggest that I be open to a call to the episcopate. In many cases I have had to say that the timing wasn't right, or a possibility wouldn't work for our family, or simply that I didn't feel called to a particular place. Yet the call itself kept coming, internally and externally.

Over the years I have found myself frequently doing work that touches upon the work a bishop would do, and I have always been fed and energized by it. As Dean of the Alexandria Region in the Diocese of Virginia, I call together our clergy for regular lunches. I have said from the start that this should be a safe place, free from the usual clergy competition and posturing. As Chair of the Committee on Priesthood I help to lead the largest ordination process in the Episcopal Church. In my role as chair of the regathering review team, clergy and lay leaders reached out to me to unburden their hearts, especially when they felt caught between the Diocese and their people. At General Convention I felt both the responsibility and the exhilaration of working on legislation which could benefit God's people. Colleagues call me regularly to ask what I think of an idea, or what I might suggest as they deal with a challenge.

The unique relationship that Immanuel is privileged to share with Virginia Seminary has allowed me to work with the Dean and other leadership towards advancing our shared ministry. It has been a joy to be so closely connected with this institution that is at the forefront of training leaders for the future of the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion. This collaboration has broadened my understanding of the wider Church beyond the confines of the parish. All of this, and more, has contributed to this vocational call.

After 28 years of priesthood I have a pretty good sense of what clergy might need, both from their bishop and from their diocese. A whole lot comes down to being noticed, to being reminded that they matter, to hearing some measure of thanks for their service, and to seeing someone actively wondering with them what God might be preparing them for next. I find those kinds of conversations to be life-giving.

This brings me to location. I am from nearby Virginia, born and raised, but I have spent time in just about every region of Maryland. I can truthfully say I have always felt a welcome from Maryland's people, and a real sense of kinship. I love Maryland's classic small towns and thriving suburbs and urban

areas. I love the mountains and beaches, and the history under almost every rock. I love the rich variety of cultures and worship styles within the Diocese, much of which I have experienced first-hand. From going to General Seminary in New York, to field education on the Upper East Side, to being a curate, and later rector, in suburban New York, to serving in inner-city Baltimore and London, and now the Washington area, I have lived in rural, suburban, and urban environments. I have been formed by all of these, and I appreciate the gifts of each.

I am also from a blue-collar background, yet throughout my career I have been called to serve among people across the socio-economic spectrum, including among people of wealth and power. I have learned to relate to people all across that spectrum, and I yearn for the Episcopal Church to engage that breadth more fully. I grew up in an evangelical tradition, but I value the broad tent *Via Media* of the Episcopal Church, which brings varying theologies together in the pursuit of God's Truth. I am a people person, an extrovert who can talk to just about anybody, and I think that comes in handy with God's children of all sorts. My wife is also a priest, serving as rector in Bethesda, in the Diocese of Washington, and I have a deep appreciation of both the challenges and the glories of the unique calling of a clergy spouse. I am an optimist, and a deep believer. Time and again I have been called to be a change-agent, pulling people together around a common vision.

A chief vision, hope, and prayer I have for the Episcopal Church is that it may be a vehicle for more and more people to come to know the living Christ and to experience the abundant life Christ offers, a life that begins now and is only more fully revealed in the next life. Evangelism has not been our strong-suit but it is absolutely key for the Church, and we have so much Good News to offer. *Maryland has so much Good News to offer!* I regularly say that, at the least, we can all say, "Come and see!" My vision is that we will all become more comfortable and competent in sharing that Good News.

I believe this call is especially urgent now, as people are desperate for a sense of hope and meaning, having grown so tired of division, despair, and anxiety. People need to hear an *authentic message of hope*. The Episcopal Church has a great opportunity to follow the lead of our enthusiastic Presiding Bishop, inviting more and more people into abundant life in Christ and walking in the way of love. I hope to play a part in forming and encouraging people to invite and to share. To do this, we need healthy parishes, schools, and other ministries that train and form people in the faith being clear about the essentials and leaving room for disagreement around the edges. This all requires effective episcopal leadership.

I hope to engage what may be my most productive vocational years now (God willing). For all these reasons, vocational, locational, personal, and so many more, I humbly submit my application.

May God bless you all,  
The Rev. J. Randolph Alexander, Jr.