

The Rev. Dr. Hillary Raining

1. What does Becoming Beloved Community mean to you? What experiences do you have walking with people on the road toward racial reconciliation, healing, and justice? How have you engaged ministries of reconciliation in your own vocation and career? What are the most important things you've learned along the way?

Becoming a Beloved Community means nothing less than realizing the vision of the fullness of the Body of Christ. It means creating a safe and inclusive environment for all people, actively working to dismantle systems of oppression--including the church-- that disproportionately affect People of Color, and striving to create a world where we "respect the dignity of every human being" as we are called to do in our baptismal vows. One of the reasons I feel drawn to submit my name for this discernment process is the clear commitment and work that your Diocese has already engaged in through the vision, accountability, and action of the Ethnic Ministries Circles of Color Network and The Office of Multicultural Ministries. I believe reconciliation work is one of the most significant calls we have as Christians, and I would be honored to add my voice and witness to those efforts.

I have had professional, spiritual, and personal dimensions in my work toward racial reconciliation, healing, and justice. With my work as a parish priest and an educator, I have had the privilege of walking with people who have experienced racism firsthand. I have listened to their stories, learned from their experiences, and worked to amplify their voices. For example, while serving as the Founding Director of the Doctorate of Ministry Program and the Director of the Center for Christian Spirituality at The General Theological Seminary, I was instrumental in bringing a wide variety of students, teachers, curriculum, and even book lists that lifted up perspectives that were not simply the "White/Wester/Colonized/Heteronmoitive/Patriarchal" worldview that is all too common in institutional spaces. Similarly, the current board membership of The Hive (a spiritual non-profit I founded) comprises an incredibly diverse group of women and non-binary theological scholars, teachers, and church leaders from around the county. It has been a great joy to cultivate this team of visionary leaders seeking to reimagine theological and spiritual teaching for our modern times.

I have also engaged in complex conversations with people who are resistant to change and challenged them to confront their own biases and prejudices. This movement has been especially true with my current parish. At St. Christopher's, we have participated in many social justice marches, raised up leadership of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ clergy, and had multiple forums and book studies that have helped to educate our mostly white members on matters of white privilege, especially in matters of our faith life. For example, we have worked extensively with our Outreach Committee to embrace a model of partnership with those we seek to minister with, rather than "charity work" to help those who are "less fortunate"--often having the unintentional effect of

"white saviorism." While these have not always been comfortable conversations, they have all been meant with people feeling empowered and dedicated to change.

Finally, this work feels important to me in my journey of intersectionality and race in my own life. Your Diocese has 24 federally recognized Native American tribes located within the geographic span of the Diocese. This fact is thrilling to me as a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Native Americans. I have felt the tension of racial intersectionality as so much of my own family's history and identity was hidden due to the fear of my grandfather being taken to a residential school. Thus, much of my research, preaching, and teaching (including a recent class at the Cathedral of St. Mark's) focuses on intersectionality and the difference between appreciation and appropriation. Some of my most gratifying research experiences have allowed me to work with my own tribe to study intersectionality and ritual. My findings have informed my publishing, teaching, and spiritual life, and I would be honored to bring these perspectives to the Diocese of Olympia leadership. For example, I recently published an article in *The Anglican Theological Review* called "Miigwech & Blood Memory: Gratitude as a Multi-lineage Spiritual Practice." Using the lens of generational, psychological, and theological studies, this article took the gratitude worldview and practices of the Ojibwa Native Americans as its entry point into the study of blood memory. It also offered suggestions for church communities looking to reclaim gratitude as a spiritual practice in modern times, drawing from the Church's institutional "blood memory."

This work is ongoing and never-ending. There is always more to learn, more work to be done, and more progress to be made. But by working together, listening to each other, and committing to the hard work of anti-racism, we can create a better world for everyone.

2. Why this Diocese? Why now? Explain what excites you about the Diocese of Olympia. What do you find daunting/challenging and why?

From a very young age, I felt called to ordained ministry. In fact, my "call moment" is my earliest memory. I was sitting on my baby sister's bedroom floor, watching dust particles float on a sunbeam. I distinctly remember thinking that the dust was the Holy Spirit and that I should catch it and give it to other people because that was what clergy members did, and that's what God wanted me to do. Ever since, I have been striving to live that call. What has been made clear to me from both my visits to the Diocese this past year as the Theologian-in-residence at St. Mark's Cathedral and your profile is that you are a group of faithful followers of Jesus who are doing the same. There is an old expression in the church that to be good at their job, one has to be the Bishop OF a place rather than the Bishop FROM a place. By that, they mean that the Bishop should not just be interested in the power of the position to launch their own agendas. Instead, they have to be so connected with the people and places of their Diocese that they are walking with them in partnership and ministry. Knowing you all, I would be honored to journey with you in striving for social justice, climate care, ministry with young people, evangelism, and more for the sake of the Gospel.

Another reason why I am honored to be discerning a call to be Bishop of the Diocese of Olympia is because of the challenges that it presents. For example, the Diocese of Olympia faces many of the same challenges as other religious organizations, such as declining membership and financial constraints. Your question of "How do we stay relevant?" is one that any church should be asking themselves as we see the mounting social shifts happening at a faster pace than the church has historically been able to keep pace with. However, I believe that with the passion and dedication of its members and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can help lead the Episcopal Church into creative and innovative ways of being church in this next chapter of Christianity.

As to the "what do I find daunting" question--well, I believe the job itself and all the attributes you seek to be daunting! The Church and Episcopacy are changing in ways we cannot imagine. The leadership it will require will need to include all the things you have rightly named in your profile. The daunting part is that I do not believe that I, or anyone else who may be discerning a call to serve as your next Bishop, possess all those sought-after gifts. But what excites me about that is that if those are the required gifts, then the Holy Spirit and the community they will serve with, will help to bring those gifts out in that person. I would be humbled to bring the modest gifts that I do have and let God and the Diocese magnify them as we grow together. I believe that that mystical and holy endeavor would be a worthy pursuit of Gospel Love, and you all articulate that vision in a way that inspires me to discern with you all in this moment.

3. Why do you think that there are declining numbers in the Episcopal Church and what is your vision for supporting Episcopal communities to find new vitality? What are some examples of how you have addressed this in other settings?

It's no secret that the Episcopal Church has seen a sharp decline in membership for decades. Several factors that contribute to this trend include changing demographics, societal shifts away from institutional religion, and a lack of engagement with young people and BIPOC communities. Add to those issues the unfortunate tendency for Episcopalians to stay quiet about their faith in the public sphere and our documented lack of widespread individual faith development that extends beyond Sunday morning, and we have a recipe for a problem that tends to keep people in paralysis rather than motivate toward institutional change.

There are things about this passing model that we will want to keep while at the same time holding space for what we will need to grieve. However, as the BCP reminds us, we do not grieve as a people without hope--because we are resurrection people. We believe God's story is never complete, and death is the gateway to larger life. Thus, within that shifting reality is a clarion call to God's people to seek new and innovative ways to be the Church to the world. The good news is that the pattern of change is not new to the Christian faith. Many historians have noted that about every 500 years, the Church undergoes a major shift and exposes patterns of how we evolve with the Holy Spirit's help. For example, the last major shift was the Reformation, when the changes in society (especially the printing press, the scientific method, and the Enlightenment) forced reformers in all

parts of the Western Church to reshape the way God's message was brought to the people. Indeed, this is a similar moment of spiritual evolution, making it a potentially exciting time to be a Christian. God asks us to resist the temptation to freeze in fear or grief or settle for change alone. What God seeks in this time is nothing short of transformation. And the seeds that God's people plant now will grow into the trees of what Christianity is being called to evolve into.

The Episcopal Church is primed to be such a change agent for The Holy Spirit. To begin with, the Episcopal tradition is steeped in its sure foundation of scripture, deep sacramental worship, and an appreciation of reason that helps us appreciate holy mystery. When these things are used as the cornerstone of our evangelism and outreach opportunities, we bring forth vital ministries that engage people where they are, whether online or in person. An example of how we have sought to do this in my current setting is with The Hive online spirituality and wellness community. Through online gatherings, we bring ancient Christian practices, such as Bible study, prayer, contemplation, and pastoral care, to people who may not feel comfortable coming to a church building. Yet, we have seen many new members join worldwide and grow in their faith and fellowship; some have even joined St. Christopher's. As another example, we have seen our youth group grow exponentially as we reimagined how we can bring young people together to engage in outreach efforts while learning key tenets of the faith. They are now bringing their friends, causing us to start a second group because it has grown quickly! There is no one answer to what might be done to help develop and revitalize our beloved Episcopal Church. But we already have what it takes to be open and welcoming to newcomers and create a culture of hospitality and inclusivity. By sharing our faith and inviting others to join us, we can help spread the Gospel's message in ways that honor the tradition and adapt for the modern age.

4. We are a geographically large and diverse Diocese (some congregations are ferry access only or 3+ hours drive away from the diocesan office). How will you engage in relationship building and getting to know the Diocese?

In 2022, I had the great honor of serving as the Theologian-in-Residence at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, which afforded me the opportunity to circumnavigate almost the entirety of the Diocese. I was blown away by all the beauty to be found in this particular part of God's creation. Of course, I am first referring to the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest, which was genuinely exhilarating as an outdoor lover and backcountry backpacker. I hiked and meditated in all three of the National Parks and a fair bit of the Olympic Peninsula and found it all unrivaled in its majesty. Yet, equally beautiful were the people I was able to meet thanks to these travels. As a person, I found the people of the Diocese of Olympia to be thoughtful, faithful, joyous, and serious about living out the call to be followers of Christ. They were hungry to learn about God's expansive and inclusive love and were busy being that love for the world.

What strikes me about that experience is how akin it was to the ancient Celtic model of the Episcopate. The Celtic Bishops were essentially long-distance athletes who would travel the geographical bounds of their regions teaching, preaching, praying, and uniting the sometimes disparate communities with one common mission. They considered it a form of perpetual pilgrimage. A modern-day equivalent of that traditional model may need to be a bit creative and unorthodox. Perhaps the next Bishop should be more Celtic-minded in their view of their role as a pilgrim and embrace the transient nature of the role. While it may not be the "normal" model that we are used to for a Bishop, I could imagine getting a conversion van and going out to the ten regions of the Diocese at a time and staying there for a few days. This model would allow for parish visitations, meetings with the regional clergy, and volunteering in local weekday ministries like soup kitchens or social justice marches. With this kind of mindset, the Bishop could be nimble in addressing real-time needs as they arise and forming a deeper bond with the Diocesan regions. I believe strongly that the Bishop should be the pastor to the pastors and would work with the clergy to combat burnout and compassion fatigue.

Additionally, we can and should make good use of the technologies that we came to rely on during the COVID-19 quarantine--things like Zoom and live streaming-- when appropriate to help facilitate conversation and community while saving time and travel costs. I have had considerable experience building spiritual communities of all kinds in the last six years, making me uniquely suited to help the Diocese make connections that feel deep and important as we use modern technology. This experience includes developing a seminary hybrid Doctorate of Ministry program at the height of COVID, leading a parish through the ups and downs of the lockdown, and being at the forefront of digital spiritual communities with the creation of The Hive ([www.thehiveapiary.com](http://www.thehiveapiary.com)). Finally, I believe in the profound nature of prayer to bind us together in the mystical Body of Christ, as Palu describes in Ephesians 4:4-6. No matter where I was, I would prioritize praying for the congregations, laity, clergy, lands, and missionary initiatives of the Diocese every day. The uniting power of the Spirit in prayer and sacrament would be foundational as we sought to build community together in Christ's name.