

The Venerable Jordan Haynie Ware SMMS

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 Beloved Community means living into God's dream of a kingdom where everyone is cherished as the beloved child of God that they are.

I moved to Canada shortly after the conclusion of their Truth & Reconciliation Commission, and really felt how much catching up I had to do. I set about building relationships with Indigenous clergy and lay leaders, as well as elders and wisdomkeepers who follow the traditional way of their ancestors outside the Church. I'm grateful to have received teaching in the medicine wheel, the seven grandfathers, sweat lodge, ribbon skirt making, and smudge. My teachers have encouraged me to serve as a smudge leader in worship. I continue to build relationships with the land and First Peoples of the land, and to invite members of the congregation into relationship as well. The parish I serve had the highest participation in a 2022 diocesan weaving project to Remember the Children who did not survive Residential Schools. Through the work of our hands, the diocese has a tangible reminder of the loss of those children, which we now use in worship, preaching, and teaching the next generation.

Good Shepherd is full of immigrants, including me – from Kenya, Nigeria, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, South Sudan, and more. We work together to create a place of safety for people of all nations to worship. One member suffered a hate crime assault the same week George Floyd was killed, and we built a BIPOC Solidarity & Support Group around them in the weeks that followed because the call to racial justice had become personal.

Together with Black members from my community, I co-founded Faith Spaces | Safe Spaces, an interfaith anti-racism movement. We began in solidarity with our Muslim sisters during a season when Black hijabi women were being targeted for hate crimes in our city. Black Christians were asking me how we could best support our neighbors. I reached out to the Muslim chaplain at the University of Alberta, and together we recruited a team of mostly Black women from our respective faiths to create Faith Spaces | Safe Spaces. Our goal is to make every faith community in our city a safe space for BIPOC worshippers to receive respite and spiritual care amid a racist society. We have expanded our team to include Jews, Baha'i, and traditional Indigenous spiritual leaders as we build a network of faithful committed to action to end racism in faith places.

Through this work, I have learned that the most important tool in racial reconciliation is relationship and credibility. To be a trusted partner as a white woman, I need to show up again and again to prove the sustainability of my commitment to the work. I need to listen,

learn, and follow the leadership of BIPOC collaborators, even when (especially when) the structure and vision of the project looks different than how I would do it. And I have learned that God will do more than we can ask or imagine.

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

Ever since my fathers-in-law moved to Washington, I have admired the work of the Diocese of Olympia. The beginning of my discernment with you included visiting all your church websites, and that is when I truly fell in love. Parish after parish and mission after mission demonstrated a tangible commitment to justice and inclusion because of their grounding in the Good News of Jesus. As I clicked through the list, I felt a strong spiritual calling to serve the people who described themselves as part of an ancient/future church that is rooted in the Gospel, committed to inclusion, and invites questioners and spiritual seekers of all kinds to come and see.

I am excited to be part of a multicultural church that is rooted in the land and your specific context. You have such an opportunity to support global decision makers in making ethical decisions that will impact millions of users of technology. These leaders may or may not identify as Episcopalians, but I guarantee you they (like everyone else) seek meaning and purpose for their lives. We have good news to share with them – news that God loves them and needs their hands to help build God’s peaceable kingdom, where all are invited. I see the challenges you face as a region, with such huge inequality between these titans of industry and those who are living in tents on the streets. But how fortunate you are to have such a mission field!

A key challenge will be how best to leverage our resources as a diocese to support the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual flourishing of our communities. A friend once told me not to look at positions on the West Coast because if I went there, my whole ministry would be about housing. But housing is exactly the ministry to which I feel called. Even in Edmonton, where the cost of living is many times lower than in the Diocese of Olympia, people are being squeezed out of affordable housing. As Christians, we follow a God who made a home among us as a wandering preacher, with no place to lay his head. We are called to a ministry of hospitality for those living on the streets around us.

Establishing a reputation as a source of help and hope for people in need, both materially rich and materially poor, spiritually rich (but alienated from the church), and spiritually poor, will be crucial for the Diocese of Olympia in particular. As climate change continues to make our natural environment more and more unpredictable, I’ve learned in my disaster chaplaincy training that the most important tool in disaster preparedness is your neighbor. I am excited to be part of a diocese which has such an opportunity to be a good neighbor to people in western Washington who will need good neighbors in the years to come.

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?

The Episcopal Church, like other community organizations, is declining because people do not see or understand the value that community brings to their lives. We live in an age of loneliness and isolation. 61% of American adults have fewer than 5 close friends; 8% have 0. I routinely sit in meetings with the YMCA, community leagues, theater groups, synagogues. Their engagement is down as much or more than the church's when compared to pre-pandemic. As living costs rise and corporate expectations grow, people feel squeezed in both their finances and their time. Not to mention the way our expectations of parents have changed! The idea of being an active part of any community group feels exhausting, and if someone has had negative experiences in the past, it makes sense they would not prioritize seeking out church as a solution to the isolation they feel.

Our church, therefore, needs to look to the witness of the Church in Acts. They went out into the world, rather than waiting for people to find them. They healed the sick and shared their bread. When they realized they had been neglecting certain members at table, they appointed a new ministerial order of deacons.

These first followers of Jesus testified to the difference their faith made in their lives, and made a difference in the lives of others, whether those others converted to Christianity or not. The good news is that God came to bring us abundant life which is about more than productivity or money - that God loves the "least of these," that God's greatest commandment is to love our neighbor. This is news the world still needs to hear.

This good news must be shared in a contextual way. In Texas, I established a book club for young moms who felt judged and shamed by other moms for the way they parented. Young women who had been disengaged from church returned to the community because they felt supported and valued by a group that offered them free childcare and a place of solidarity. In Edmonton, we've established a Belonging Centre in partnership with a homeless services organization to create a space where people with and without homes can belong. This is bigger than just a drop-in center, where folks living outdoors can warm up for a minute or receive services. It is about building a community where absolutely everyone is invited, particularly those who usually aren't invited, a community where those who usually get kicked out can truly belong.

In the Diocese of Olympia, this will look differently for churches in Seattle or Olympia than in Blaine or Forks or Friday Harbor. It will be important for the diocese to support each community in building relationships that add value to people's lives in the way that works best for them, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all, top-down program.

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?

Relationship building is at the heart of my ministry. When I first arrived at my current congregation, I prioritized hosting groups of parishioners for dinner at my home. Breaking bread together is the best way I know to build community. I also wrote cards to members who had become disconnected from church, and made space in my calendar to meet in person with leaders from neighborhood agencies and community groups. It was only by meeting each of these groups and the people that make them up that I was able to hear the whole story of our community. Each individual story was a critical part of that whole.

The challenge of building relationships across distance is one that we are very familiar with on the Canadian prairies, especially when winter makes driving treacherous for months at a time. The pandemic has led to a giant leap forward in our comfort using technology to gather. It remains true that there are still communities that lack reliable internet access or are otherwise unable to use those technological tools to the fullness of their capacity, and that a Zoom meeting is no substitute for seeing one another face to face, shaking hands, sharing fellowship. I'll never forget the story one elder told of a rural community sending someone to drive hundreds of miles to offer him protocol in invitation to return to that community and share his teachings. That level of respect is what is needed to build solid relationships.

I am no stranger to long drives (I love a good audiobook) and will make visiting every ministry context to hear their story my first priority. And the best way for the whole story of the diocese to come together will be for the bishop to not be the only one building those relationships. I've been blessed to serve as part of the Bishop of Edmonton's episcopate circle, which, informed by Indigenous teaching and practice, shares episcopal ministry with the bishop. We recognize that the episcopal office is stronger when it is made up of a circle of leaders. The Diocese of Olympia is already organized into regions. I will make use of regional leaders to build relationships across the diocese by not saying, "I alone can do it," but by building a team of storytellers and story listeners. We will grow in relationship together when the bishop's office is not a hub in the middle of a circle otherwise disconnected from one another, but one node in a web of Episcopalians all working together to recognize our unique stories and how they fit together to make up the story of the Episcopal Church in western Washington.

A saint has said, "You say you love the poor - tell me, what are their names?" God knows us each by name, and that personal knowledge of people and their stories, and how they fit together, is the place from which my ministry grows.