

Discernment Questions for the Selection of a Bishop

The Rev. Jim Hobby's Answers

As Bishop, you will probably be challenged by conflict. What are the general principles that will govern how you handle conflict within a local congregation? Between a local congregation and the Diocese? Please share with us a specific situation of conflict that you consider successful and the specific situation that was not successful. What was your role in the conflict? What would you do differently, if you had the chance?

General Principles for Handling Conflict

1. Recognize every conflict as potentially redemptive and productive. Conflict is often the way that God takes us deeper in our relationship with Him and with others. We need not fear it. We want to develop an ethos of admonition and reconciliation on our diocese, keeping short accounts in our relationships.
2. Commit to relationships. The undergirding reality of any redemptive conflict is a commitment to the relationship. One expression of this commitment is charitable assumption: the belief that we have each other's best at heart and that we will not do anything intentionally to hurt each other. This allows us the freedom to go to each other when offended to bring reconciliation to the relationship. Another expression of this commitment is working to keep the conflict from getting between us. We want always to be looking together at the issue instead of looking at each other through the issue.
3. Catch it early. Avoiding conflict (unless it is deemed unimportant – see #4) rarely solves conflict. Addressing conflict quickly through admonition or confession keeps it from growing in intensity.
4. Assess its importance. There are times when an unintentional offense is too minor to spend time and energy on. If, however, there develops a pattern of small offenses admonition is appropriate.
5. Keep it from becoming personal. This means taking great care in our language. "What you said offended me" allows a conversation to ensue. "You are an inconsiderate jerk" builds a wall. As we allow conflict to progress we cease working together to solve a problem and begin plotting against each other.
6. Identify and focus on the problem to be solved. Is the conflict a matter of unfulfilled or unrealistic expectations? Is the conflict a difference of opinion? Is the conflict a matter of insensitivity? The clearer the definition of the problem, the easier the solution is to find.
7. Own our part in the conflict. Rarely is a conflict completely one-sided. We each need to identify the part that we have played. Identifying the log in our own eyes helps us to move towards each other with humility.
8. Seek win-win solutions. Since we are committed to each other's best and since we believe that God's resources are limitless, we believe that we can work towards a resolution that is mutually satisfying. This means communicating clearly what a "win" looks like for us, thinking creatively and putting away anger (usually called "frustration"), malice, impatience and power.
9. Engage the help of others as needed. Ministries like Peacemakers have folks trained in conciliation.

Examples of How I've Handled Conflicts

A Conflict Not Handled Well

I have learned a great deal from the conflicts in this category! While the Rector of a parish, I had a staff person who lead a significant ministry that had its own income stream and that had enjoyed two decades of relative autonomy from Vestry oversight before I was called as Rector. As the Vestry sought to bring this ministry under its fiscal oversight, this staff member resisted the changes that were being made. After several months of attempting to bring the two sides together, the staff person challenged my integrity as a leader at a meeting. I got angry, called her into my office and informed her that she needed to start looking for another job. This led to all kinds of hurt feelings, anger, recrimination against me and the church (including a local news crew arriving at a meeting).

If I could do it over, I would bring the key folks together at the very outset of the conflict in order to identify the issues and look for a win-win solution. If the staff person decided to remain uncooperative, I would have still asked her to leave; but without the anger, with more careful thought about how to inform her and with the support of the Vestry.

A Conflict Handled Well

I arrived at a parish as the new Rector at the beginning of November. Before I knew it, and with boxes still unpacked in my office, it was time to start planning for Christmas. I asked the staff generally about Christmas customs. They assured me that since I was the Rector I could do anything that I wanted to do. This is clearly, in hindsight, not an answer to the question I posed and I failed to catch that. They were just getting to know me and, not wanting to get off on the wrong foot with their new boss, offered a technically correct answer. So we proceeded with planning and had a wonderful set of services, including the children's service.

The first week in January the Rector Emeritus (who had served the parish for 20 years and was still living in town) called me and invited to take me to lunch. During our lunch he informed me that when he was called to the parish he had inherited a tradition of building the Creche during the children's Christmas Eve service. That tradition was so meaningful to some people that they would travel back to the church from hours away to have their children experience it.

The next Sunday I apologized to the congregation for unintentionally dismissing a long-held tradition. I assured them that it would be back next Christmas and would remain until the Lord saw fit to lead us in a different direction. I found that I gained a lot of goodwill from the apology (probably more than was lost in the oversight). I chose to do this because my presence as Rector was already a huge change for the congregation as I was "young" (36), evangelical and a Yankee (growing up in the North trumped my being born in Atlanta). It seemed wise to affirm positive traditions, especially those that had huge potential for proclaiming the Gospel.

If I were to do it again, I would ask more questions and listen more carefully to the answers.

As Bishop you will be the chief pastor for our clergy. Tell us, how do you propose to keep our clergy healthy, addressing specifically the areas of spiritually, physically, and in relationships. Please share with us what you do personally to stay healthy and grounded.

I would like to see the diocese provide tools, opportunities and accountability for clergy wholeness, holiness and effectiveness.

First, I'd like to see clergy develop a comprehensive pattern (rule) of life. This pattern of life would be a clear and specific plan for stewarding our most important relationships and for taking care of ourselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We could develop a tool to help clergy think through how they are taking care of their souls (Bible reading, prayer, corporate worship, times away, spiritual reading, etc.), bodies (exercise, rest, diet), and minds (reading, courses, etc.). It would ask questions about days off and vacation time (encouraging both!). The pattern of life would also address our relationships with our spouses, our families, our friends and our congregations.

Secondly, clergy need a way of measuring our effectiveness as leaders. This would include the development of simple strategic plans for our parishes that include goals large enough to inspire effort and plans specific enough to celebrate incremental success. Strategic plans would include measures of both health and growth.

Thirdly, included in the diocesan pattern of life would be clergy assessment in order to fit the passion, gifting, temperament, experience, life-stage, etc. of our clergy with ministry opportunities. Also included would be an on-going plan for life-long learning that each priest/deacon/bishop would develop and an intentional plan for the diocese to provide helpful opportunities for vocational development.

Finally, I'd like to see an effective system of support and accountability for each ordained leader. This system would include spouses, the bishop, coaches, mentors and spiritual directors. As soon as is feasible, I'd like to see a group of coaches trained to provide thoughtful, confidential support for clergy as leaders. I would also work to develop the resources needed for spiritual direction for the clergy. The diocesan system of support also needs a resource team that has expertise in clergy wellness issues and can offer perspective to the diocesan leadership and programs to the clergy.

What do I do? Here is an overview of my pattern. I am rarely completely successful in fulfilling this plan on any given week. But it provides (even in the breach) a picture of what a healthy, grounded life would look like for me.

1. Steward of my soul: each Saturday during my Bible reading and prayer time I look ahead at the next week and schedule in an hour a day for Bible reading and prayer. I've found that this works better than setting up a set time for each day. I try to get away one morning a month for prayer. I keep a journal (somewhat sporadically). I attend worship weekly and always have a book on a spiritual theme going. I regularly take one day off each week. Taking extended (i.e. more than a week long) vacations is a challenge (this is confession, not bragging!).

2. Steward of my body: I (try to) run three times a week (3-4 miles), keep my weight under control (currently trying to get under 180 with my ultimate goal being 169), and get adequate rest (7-8 hours).

3. Steward of my mind: Along with spiritual reading, I always have other books going (usually something on leadership) along with a variety of periodicals. I try to participate in significant continuing education opportunities each year.

4. Steward of my relationships: Shari and I try to schedule in a weekly date night and a monthly time away. With my daughters being grown and out of the house, our times together are more sporadic than when they were home. But we stay in touch on a regular basis.

5. Coaching: I talk monthly to a coach in California who helps me stay focused on my personal and ministry priorities.

Again as Bishop, you will have disciplinary powers over the clergy. Please share with us how you approach issues concerning clergy discipline. For example, if there is an accusation of sexual misconduct, what would be the appropriate steps that you would take?

Clergy discipline needs to be principled, just and compassionate. Therefore, the new diocese needs a clear set of principles, policies and procedures. These should be communicated to and understood by all clergy and parish leaders. Clergy should never feel blindsided by the disciplinary authority of a bishop. At the same time legitimate complaints of clergy misconduct should receive timely and effective action. The goal of all Christian discipline, it seems to me, is redemption and reconciliation.

In thinking about an accusation of sexual misconduct coming to the bishop, these seem to be the appropriate steps (though I would want folks much better versed in this sort of thing to help write the policies):

Assess the substance of the written accusation. This would include things like the clarity and specificity of the accusation and the credibility of the accuser. I would expect that the bishop would work with a team of folks who have training, expertise and experience in these matters.

Decide whether the accusation is a matter that needs to be dismissed (because it isn't really a matter of discipline; for example, "I think the Rector is creepy"), pursued or referred (i.e. to the police; statutory rape, for example).

If the matter should be pursued, then a conversation with the accused clergy person would happen. If the person confesses to wrongdoing, then a plan of discipline, healing and restoration would be worked out with the appropriate people involved (i.e. accused, spouse, Wardens, etc.), the goal being redemptive conciliation. If the accused denies the charges, then a formal investigation (by the canonical investigator, a role required by national canons) would start and an ecclesiastical court would be convened. Any priest or deacon who is accused and found guilty by a ecclesiastical court would have the right to appeal the decision.

As I said above, this all needs to be set out clearly in our diocesan canons.

Tell us, how would you facilitate a Church that is seeking to join our Diocese, and offering healing for a Church that may have left the Episcopal Church?

There are three issues regarding congregations wanting to join our diocese: relationship, leadership and vision. First, part of the DNA of this diocese is that we are highly relational. Therefore, any congregation wanting to join us would need to build relationships with other congregations. I don't ever foresee an application process detached from personal knowledge. An important consideration for bringing a congregation into the diocese (or planting a new congregation) will be the perspective of regional leaders (deans, clergy, wardens, vestries, etc.). We would want to provide some way for congregations with interest in joining becoming part of our life (attending gatherings, joining in cooperative ministries, etc.) as a way of getting to know each other.

Secondly, it would be important to know the leaders of the new congregation. Is this a congregation being led out or TEC by lay people? Or is there ordained leadership involved as well? Is the leadership healthy and grounded?

Finally, we would want to make sure that the vision of the new congregation aligns with the vision of the diocese. Is the congregation rooted in the Scriptures? Is it committed to essential Anglicanism (as outlined in the Jerusalem Declaration)? Is it relational, cooperative and missional?

Regarding healing from leaving TEC (or any other denomination) here are several thoughts:

Recognize that healing from grief is a process; and that pain and anger are part of that process.

Identify specific places of wounding and/or places of reactive sin (e.g. responding to abuse of authority with gossip, judgment, anger, malice).

Offer hope and opportunities for healing prayer.

Cast a winsome vision of the future, helping the congregation define itself positively rather than negatively. This includes redefining “we” from “those who left” to “those who are moving forward” (recognizing that in a healthy church it won’t take long before there are a lot people in the new “we” who were not part of the old “we”).

Admonish (i.e. call to godly behavior) when needed.

Tell us, what is your vision for growing the body of Christ in our new Diocese?

We need to focus on both health and growth. In order to do that, we need to develop or identify helpful tools for measuring both (for example, Natural Church Development material). Each congregation needs to ground itself in passionate spirituality expressed through inspiring worship, loving relationship, and context-sensitive evangelism (both local and global). We need leaders who are able to equip others, biblically-based discipleship and functional administrative structures. All these things need to be intentionally part of our vision, objectives and plans.

Trinity, Thomasville, for example, has developed a strategic plan that includes the following objectives:

By 2015, attain and sustain the following benchmarks of health and effective ministry:

- *80% of average worship attendance involved in gift-based ministry.*
- *120% of average worship attendance involved in small groups.*
- *50% incorporation rate for first-time guests.*
- *15% annual net growth in average weekly attendance (50% of which is coming from folks professing Christ for the first time).*

By 2020, start 4 new congregations (in and around Thomasville).

By 2025, establish 2 church-planting centers in other S. GA hub towns (such as Albany, Bainbridge, Moultrie, Valdosta).

As a diocese we also need a strategy for planting new healthy congregations. Christ Church, Savannah, is starting Anglican Mission Fellowships as seeds of new congregations. I think this is a great model for both large and small churches.

From a recent conversation about a missional strategy for the diocese with Bp. James Oshiel of Kenya these five elements emerged:

Mindset: We need to change the way we think. Every congregation in the diocese, no matter the size, needs to be thinking about how it will reproduce.

Mapping: We need to identify strategic cities. Paul went to the centers of commerce, government and education to proclaim the Gospel. We need to be planting churches in every town that has a university or a super Walmart (starting with those, like Valdosta, that have both!). From these hub cities we will be able to plant congregations in surrounding communities.

Manpower: We need to be raising up a cadre of lay leaders (like the Lay Catechists and Lay Readers in Kenya) who can gather small (but growing) groups in their homes as the seeds of new congregations. We also need to rethink our process for training clergy in order to tap into the strengths of residential, academic formation and on-the-job training.

Models: We need to develop a few workable church planting models that we can use in a variety of cities and church planting contexts.

Methods: We need to share our best practices with each other. There is no reason that every congregation needs to figure everything out on its own. It is easier to adapt something than to create it. If one congregation has something figured out, let's share that knowledge.

The description of the bishop's role that we have developed for this diocese gives a great deal of guidance regarding growing a healthy diocese, particularly the sections on "Strategist for Mission" and "Overseer of Effective Ministry."

Question number 6 is for both you and your spouse. What role will your wife play in your ministry as Bishop? How do you see your role as the Bishop's wife?

From Shari:

When our oldest daughter, Elizabeth Joy, was almost 6, she came running to me and said, "Mommy, I'm not sure I know how to be a 6-year-old. I've never been one before." I replied that I had never been the mother of a 6-year-old before. We agreed that "Maybe we can learn together." Every year we renewed that pledge to learn the next stage of life together.

In considering how I see my role as Bishop's wife, I echo Elizabeth's comments. "I'm not sure I know how to be a bishop's wife, I've never been one before." But, I'm confident I will learn.

Having said that, it is hard for me to imagine (now) that things would change all that much for me. I remain a Child of God and my intent is to love, worship and obey Him. I remain Jim's wife (in our 30th year of marriage) and our relationship continues to grow and be the primary source of cherished affection, solid partnership, trust, respect and fun. It is our aim to be a living icon of the love that Christ has for the Church. I remain my children's mother though they are grown and out of the house now. I remain a Priest of the Church, currently serving as Vicar of Trinity, Thomasville, and serving the wider Councils of the Church, per my ordination vows, in ways that fit my passion, gifting and availability.

As Bishop's wife, there would be a different array of ministry options and leadership venues to consider. I would guess that I will still want to be doing more than I possibly can (both at Trinity, in the Diocese and in the wider Church) and the continued challenge would be to make choices between many good possibilities. My leadership at Trinity would enable Jim to be the rector/bishop, and I would not always be able to accompany him. I would continue to meet regularly with my intercessors, an essential part of my life currently. I have already asked Bishop Guernsey to consider continuing a pastoral relationship with me if Jim were to be chosen bishop.

If the discernment of this Diocese is that Jim is to be our first bishop, I am committed to learning with Jim, learning with Trinity and learning with the Diocese how this will work in satisfying ways for all of us,

including bringing glory to God in all that we say and do. I've never been a bishop's wife before. Maybe we can learn together.

From Jim:

Shari said it eloquently! We would work together to discern God's leading regarding her role as a bishop's wife.

Tell us, your vision of how the Bishop will use his time between being a full time Church priest, and Bishop?

The one thing that is perfectly clear about the new role that this diocese is envisioning for its bishop is that it will be impossible without changing expectations. As I run the numbers, here is what I come up with (all of which is somewhat stabbing in the dark):

A 1/3 time position: 2 days/week x 48 weeks (assuming 4 weeks vacation) = 96 days/year	
Provincial meetings/responsibilities	18 days/year
Monthly clergy gatherings (x10)	10 days/year
Quarterly Diocesan Council meetings	4 days/year
Monthly meeting with Deans (x10)	10 evenings/year (4 before meetings with Council and 6 before meetings with Clergy, 2 of which would include the leaders of the various resource teams)
Monthly congregational visits (x10)	10 days (Sundays)
Quarterly regional visits (4 x 4)	16 days
Total of above	58 days + 10 evenings
Administrative and pastoral	38 days (not counting the evenings) or 3-4 days /month

It is obvious from these numbers that there will need to be some rethinking of expectations. For example, it will no longer be possible for the bishop to do confirmation in each parish every year. This may mean regional or cooperative confirmations. The bishop will not have time to be chief administrator of a complex organization. He will need to be a teacher, a connector, an encourager of other's ministries. What I have described maximizes the bishop's time with clergy and other leaders but gives very little office time. I believe that if we want a part-time overseer then we will want him out in the regions rather than in his office. What I have described also puts the bishop's focus on coordinating the ministry of others (most specifically the clergy and the deans). The only way that the new model will work is if there is significant buy-in by all the clergy and parishes because we will need for everyone to pitch in, offering their gifts and expertise for the good of the whole diocese.