

The Reverend Canon E. Mark Stevenson



Age (at time of Nominating Synod): 45

Diocese of Canonical Residence:

Louisiana

Current Position:

Canon to the Ordinary
Diocese of Louisiana

Spouse:

Joyce Owen Stevenson

Email:

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Church Website:

www.edola.org

Personal Website:

None

Résumé

THE REV'D CANON E. MARK STEVENSON

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Baton Rouge, LA 70817
225-615-4755

GOAL IN MINISTRY

To use the talents and abilities God has given me to spread the Gospel, providing an environment of faith and grace that will allow the power of Christ to transform lives.

CHURCH EXPERIENCE

THE DIOCESE OF LOUISIANA

SEPTEMBER 2005 THROUGH PRESENT

New Orleans, Louisiana

Canon to the Ordinary

Chief Operations Officer / Chief of Staff for a Diocese of 54 congregations.

- Although called prior to the storms of Fall 2005, this ministry began two days following the devastation of much of New Orleans and the surrounding area by hurricane Katrina.
- Principal advisor to the bishop, providing data needed for action and decision making.
- Serve as a resource to clergy and congregations in their mission and ministry for the benefit of Christ's Church.
- Preach and teach throughout the diocese.
- Consult with congregations in times of clergy transition, and, as Deployment Officer, identify and recruit ordained leaders with the skills to minister in a new and changing environment.
- Took a primary leadership role in the evaluation of the results of the storms of 2005, and in the strategic planning for relief and recovery.
- Worked with a professional consulting firm to review operations, and implemented a redesign of the diocese to more efficiently direct relief efforts, finances, and ministries.
- Facilitated the planting of the Church of All Souls' in the predominantly African-American community of the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans, an area destroyed by flood waters and with no previous Episcopal Church presence.
- Led the effort to develop funding for a full-time Diocesan Youth Ministry Coordinator, and worked to identify the first person to take up this call.
- Implemented new policies and routines to bring diocesan finances to a place of transparency and accountability.
- Responsible to the bishop for a support staff of over twenty professionals (Administrative and Disaster Response), the coordination of over one hundred priests and deacons throughout the diocese, and a budget of more than four million dollars.
- Represent the bishop at various diocesan and national church gatherings, in ecumenical and secular meetings, and in the congregations of Louisiana on Sundays and throughout the week.

THE CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

MAY 2004 THROUGH AUGUST 2005

Maitland, Florida

Rector

An active congregation of two hundred fifty, with a total of four hundred fifty members.

- Provided pastoral care and leadership to a theologically, politically, and ethnically diverse body of Christians.
- Participated in the moments of God's grace-filled presence in people's lives, celebrating the times of joy and working through the periods of sorrow.
- Supervised a lay staff of sixteen, and a clergy staff of three (one Assisting Priest and two Deacons).
- Responsible for an annual operations budget of \$425,000, and the oversight of a five acre, seven building physical plant.
- Served as Head of the Good Shepherd Preschool.
- Emphasized and re-energized youth ministry by moving from a part-time Youth Minister to a full-time Director of Youth Ministries.

Recruited a trained, degree-holding lay person to fill this new role.

- Redesigned the Christian Education and Formation programs to include new topics and more offerings, on both Sunday mornings and throughout the week.
- Directed a discipleship-oriented stewardship program in 2004 which resulted in a 12% increase in financial pledges and a regeneration of energies for volunteer work in parish mission.
- Guided the process of developing a Visitor-to-New-Member orientation and integration program.

THE DIOCESE OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

MAY 2004 THROUGH AUGUST 2005

Orlando, Florida

Member of the Clergy Events Committee, June 2004 - August 2005.

Assisted in the planning and direction of diocesan clergy conferences, retreats, and special events.

THE CHURCH OF THE ANNUNCIATION

AUGUST 2000 THROUGH APRIL 2004

New Orleans, Louisiana

Rector

A racially and theologically diverse urban congregation of nearly one hundred active persons, with a total of two hundred members.

- Instituted new educational opportunities, including small group studies and discipleship training.
- Deepened parish life involvement through the addition of activities such as an annual Youth Mission Trip, a neighborhood St. Francis Day Pet Blessing, a Lenten Crawfish Boil, and a Vacation Bible School.
- Worked closely with the Belizean, African and Anglo American members of the parish to strengthen relationships, build cross-cultural understandings and deepen a sense of community and shared faith.
- In order to revitalize ministry with youth, conducted a Capital Stewardship Campaign. The three year goal of \$150,000 was over-subscribed by \$54,000.
- In January 2002, called the first full-time and salaried Director of Youth Ministries in parish history.
- Formed and led a choir following nearly eight years without an organized music program.
- Through prayer, preaching and teaching, parish giving increased to a level where the operations budget was balanced in fiscal 2003 and 2004. Previous deficits had been as high as \$22,000.
- Directed a \$60,000 renovation of the entrance to the parish hall, and a \$64,000 renovation of the church proper.
- Oversaw the parish's first Strategic Planning process.

THE DIOCESE OF LOUISIANA

AUGUST 2000 THROUGH APRIL 2004

New Orleans, Louisiana

Member of the Standing Committee, April 2003 - April 2004.

Vice President and Chair, Episcopal Community Services, February 2002 - April 2004.

Chair of the Committee on the Dispatch of Business, February 2002 - April 2004.

Member of the Diocesan Department of Stewardship, January 2001 - March 2002.

OTHER WORK EXPERIENCE

MALCO THEATRES, INC.

JANUARY 1987 THROUGH JULY 1997

Memphis, Tennessee

Vice President - Construction Operations, May 1997 - July 1997.

Coordinated and directed all phases of the construction of movie theatre complexes for one of the largest theatre companies in the Mid-South, from initial design through the completion of the building process.

- Project budgets reached totals in excess of \$4,000,000.
- Developed procedures and designs to be in compliance with new legislation and government regulations, most particularly the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Assistant to the Director of Operations, May 1994 - May 1997.

Created and administered policy in the areas of Theatre Management, Concession/Food Sales and New Construction, with budget oversight exceeding \$60,000,000. **Position evolved into a primary responsibility for Construction**

Operations in mid-1995.

Area Manager, December 1992 - May 1994.

Supervised multiple movie theatre locations in the Memphis area.

Theatre Manager, January 1987 - December 1992.

Immediate responsibility for the corporate flagship movie theatre, with gross sales of more than \$6,000,000 annually.

KERASOTES THEATRES

Champaign, Illinois

Theatre Management, May 1985 - January 1987.

FEBRUARY 1982 THROUGH JANUARY 1987

EDUCATION

Master of Divinity, Cum Laude

Nashotah House Seminary

MAY 2000

Nashotah, Wisconsin

Bachelor of Science - Marketing and Business Administration

University of Illinois

MAY 1986

Urbana-Champaign, Illinois

Written Responses to Questions by the Nominee

The Reverend Canon E. Mark Stevenson

1. Who do you say Jesus Christ is?

Jesus is the Son of the Living God, the Second Person of the Holy and Undivided Trinity. Jesus is both fully God and fully human. He was there when the Spirit moved across the waters of creation, when life was breathed into me, and he is present with me through all of the days of my life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life; he is my friend, my judge, my advocate and my savior.

Scripture, the Creeds, the writings of great theologians and the prayers of humble mystics throughout the centuries are full of words that try to get at one piece or another of the great Truth that is Christ. For me, they all come together at different times and in different ways to remind me that Jesus is the one who shows me the life God intends for me.

Jesus was and is a teacher; in the temple with the experts, in the synagogue with the common folks, in front of huge crowds on a mountain or sitting beside a well in the heat of the day with an outcast woman from an outcast culture who so desperately needed to learn that God loved her, too. Jesus teaches by word and action, and the lessons learned from him can and do change us for the better.

Jesus is a person who knows the value of family and friends. He surrounded himself with a group of diverse thinkers and backgrounds, and found joy in each of them. Jesus developed deep friendships, he knew how to throw a good party, and, as evidenced by the scene at the tomb of Lazarus, he was not afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve. He loved his mother, making certain with some of his last words that she would be cared for after the horrible events of his own death.

Jesus is a source of strength. His image of the Good Shepherd acknowledges that God is aware of the troubles that are always there in life, waiting to prey on us whether we are ready for them or not. Yet Jesus has never been afraid to get down into the trenches, to fight with all that he has for me and for us all. Former Archbishop of Canterbury Michael Ramsey wrote that when all is dark, when life is dead, when human actions are exhausted, it is then that God acts. Jesus makes the action of God real in my life when all other sources of strength fail.

Finally, Jesus is the salvation - the true health - of the world. He saved me at my baptism when I was adopted into his death and resurrection, he saves me each day as I turn to him, and he will save me on the last day. All of the brokenness of this fallen world, the hurt and struggles of my life, the pain and failure that confronts us all, each of these things pail in comparison to the mighty power of the cross and the glory of the resurrection.

In summary, Jesus Christ is Lord - - of heaven, of earth, and of my life.

2. What is the gospel message?

The Good News is that no matter how dark the Good Fridays of our life might seem, Easter Day is real. The tomb was empty, Christ is raised, death has no power and life has new meaning when lived for and with God.

A particular event that occurred early in my priesthood always comes to mind when I think of this. I met one day, completely by chance, a certain man and his wife while browsing the shelves in a local bookstore. Charlie was in his mid-sixties, and had led a rather rough and edgy life. He had recently met and married Valarie, and she had shown him that there was indeed love for him in this world. Together they were searching for bigger answers to life's questions, and on that particular day God put us all in the same aisle of religious books, and the Spirit led strangers to become friends.

Over the coming months I learned much about Charlie, in particular his low sense of self-worth and his absolute conviction that he was beyond redemption. He had done and witnessed unimaginable horrors in his life. He was afraid; he was angry; he was confused. But he let me pray with him, and study the scriptures with him, and talk about Jesus with him. And so when he learned from his doctor that the cancer he had thought was in remission was back in full force he faced it with a certain sense of peace that was nearly indescribable. Instead of falling back into despair, Charlie began to look forward with hope to the promise of new life offered to him freely and without prejudice through faith in Jesus. He came to grips with the wrong he had done in his life, and to see that God had never turned his back on him.

Before he died I had the joy of celebrating five of the church's seven sacraments with Charlie (all but Confirmation and Ordination), giving him his first Communion and blessing his marriage just hours before he took his last breath. Everyone in that room that night knew that God loved Charlie - - no one more so than Charlie himself.

The gospel shows us that the transformative power of God's love is available to us all. God understands our struggles because in the person of Jesus he experienced them. God understands our hopes and dreams, because we were created in his image. God invites us to that place where we can once again walk with him in the garden in the cool of the day and be still, knowing that he is God.

The Good News is that Jesus lived, died and was raised from the dead so that this can all be ours.

3. What is your understanding of "Mission" and "Ministry"?

In Matthew 28, Jesus tells us to make disciples of all nations; in Matthew 25 he tells us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and welcome the stranger. I believe these two teachings speak clearly to the mission and ministry to which every Christian is called. They are much like the two

arms of Jesus stretched out on the cross in an image of capturing the whole world in his loving embrace.

Jesus tells his disciples that as they are going about their work they are to make disciples, to teach others about him so that they might know the love of God and the value that he has for them. And just like his original disciples, we live in a world that is desperate to know Christ. I spend a great deal of time working in New Orleans, where children regularly murder other children over nothing more than a pair of shoes. Not long ago a twelve year old boy was given a gun by his mother and sent out to shoot another boy simply because the child had insulted him. These children have no sense of their own value, no experience of the sure and certain hope that comes from life in Christ.

Even in less radical circumstances people are in need of the saving power of the gospel. In many cases in America those in their twenties and early thirties did not grow up active in a church, and so their children have even less connection to it. The baby boomer generation is aging and for the first time in many of their lives they are experiencing a loss of control or a promise for a better tomorrow. Secular philosophies offer a quick fix to spiritual needs, and so-called TV Evangelists promise a gospel of prosperity that has no basis in reality and leaves people even more spiritually hollow when something goes wrong in their life.

Into this we are sent to speak the good news that Christ Jesus is there when no one else is; that he loves us, and he has a better way of life for us. Our mission is not to save people -- *that* is the work of Christ. What we are called to do is to make him known so that others might indeed come to know his salvation.

And one of the most powerful ways of accomplishing that task is through the ministry spelled out by Jesus in Matthew 25. In New Orleans we have connected more people to Christ by ripping mold-infested sheet rock out of flooded homes than by being experts in systematic theology. A woman who has lost everything understands what it means to be fed because of grace. A child who looks into the face of an adult who clothes him without condition learns that he has value. A family that has a roof over its head because a mission team from some church they have never heard of has helped to rebuild their home knows that it is a part of a much bigger family -- that of a God who knows each member by name.

4. Provide an autobiographical sketch of your life, including those turning points which were significant in your spiritual development.

My life's journey has been one that is guided and protected by God, full of growth through repeated encounters with Christ. I was baptized as an infant in the Episcopal Church, but my early years were spent attending Roman Catholic churches after the tradition of my father's family. I have fond memories of going to church with my grandparents, as my grandmother explained to me the meaning of the symbols and rituals. I came to know God through others who loved him.

My family returned to the Episcopal Church when I was a young teen living in Rantoul, Illinois. At St. Christopher's I was introduced to the wonderful tradition and richness of Anglican worship. That deeply caring and prayerful community kept me well-grounded through my high school years, as well as during my time in college at the University of Illinois. After college I moved to Memphis, where I struggled with life as a young adult. I was greatly blessed by the ministry of my parish priest, who taught me to pray the Daily Offices and nurtured my budding sense of vocation. It was also he who introduced me to the woman I would marry - - an act that would bless me in so many ways.

As part of my discernment for ordained ministry I volunteered at the downtown Street Ministry and encountered Christ in the lives of those who had almost nothing by secular standards. Simple, heartfelt prayer with the clients and staff focused me on the presence of God in a way I never before truly understood.

Upon graduation from seminary I was called to be the rector of a parish in New Orleans. God was smiling on me, as I quickly fell in love with the people of the Church of the Annunciation. They let me make rookie mistakes; they invited me into their lives; and, they let me experience the living love of Jesus with them.

I was called away from New Orleans for a time to serve as rector of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Maitland, Florida. I had not been there long when I was called back to Louisiana. Joy and I were packing up our home in anticipation of our move when we turned on our television to watch, dumbfounded, the destruction of hurricane Katrina. Prayer seemed both simple and impossible, for nothing can prepare you to see bodies floating down streets that you have driven for years.

My journey since Katrina has challenged me spiritually, yet it has made even clearer to me the undeniable truth that Jesus keeps his promise to be with us always. I have witnessed people of great faith do amazing things, and I have seen those same people collapse in tears. I have prayed with those who don't know what to pray for, and I have seen prayer answered in miraculous ways. But most importantly, I have come to understand in a tangible way that a life lived for the service of God and others is the life-long calling of a Christian disciple.

5. Describe your rule of life in detail.

I try to live my life grounded both in prayer and study, turning that work toward a ministry of proclaiming Christ to the world through action all the while seeking the face of Christ in others.

My prayer life includes a regular routine of Morning and Evening Prayer, as well as times of less formal prayer with individuals and groups with whom I come into contact throughout the day. The rhythm of the Daily Offices in particular are important to me, as they add structure and

discipline to my sometimes chaotic life. Even in times when focusing on the words or prayers is difficult, I find strength in the knowledge that Christians across the globe are reading and praying similar words at roughly the same time. This reminds me that I am a part of something larger than myself.

The centerpiece of my prayer life is the celebration of the Eucharist. As a Christian and as a priest it is foundational to my spiritual well being. In the sacrament of Bread and Wine we experience the presence of Christ in a unique and tangible way, and through that act I come to know God in a powerful way. Standing before an altar and a gathered Christian community I share in a heavenly feast that refocuses my attention on all that is truly important.

Religious study is very important to the strengthening of my relationship with God. I read a variety of authors and topics, from early Christian writings to more contemporary theologians. Scripture study is certainly important, of course. Lately I have been reading works on the basics of the Christian Faith, reminding myself that there are certain core principles upon which all theology rests.

I seek spiritual counsel from others on a regular basis. It is said that a lawyer who defends him or herself at trial has a fool for a client, and I believe the same sentiment applies to Christians in general and pastors in particular when it comes to determining the best course of personal action. For me, counsel takes the form of spiritual direction, sacramental confession and good, old-fashioned timely advice. I may not always like what I hear, but God constantly surprises me by speaking wisdom through the mouths of those around me.

What has truly come as a pleasant surprise to me over the past several years is that my life with God is strengthened through work with groups of people just like me who are doing their best to live their lives as faithful Christians. Working on projects with congregations, teaching forums on our common life, preaching the gospel, and being a pastor in all manner of settings - these things draw me closer and closer to the one who has my best interest at heart: Jesus, the Son of God.

6. Based on your reading of the Diocesan Profile (including the Survey) and any other knowledge you have, what do you see that is positive and what do you see that is challenging for the next Bishop of Springfield?

Having grown up in Central Illinois I know the richness of community and faith that is found across the Midwest. The close-knit nature of rural communities, the resources of the major metro areas and the exciting educational opportunities available through the many colleges and universities all provide a wonderful quality of life. The next Bishop of Springfield will be blessed to have this environment in which to minister and from which to raise up others to ministry.

It strikes me as a very good thing that so many of the respondents to the survey reported a desire to have a bishop who is a pastor to the diocese, and who is committed to healthy relationships. It seems to me that folks want to get to know their new bishop and for the bishop to know them; this is essential for a vital church.

Your work with youth and young adults, particularly in college towns, is exciting. Youth groups and student organizations are terrific resources for mission. In my time in Louisiana I have seen first hand the energy that spreads throughout a diocese when there is passion in these areas. Three times in my ministry - twice in parishes and once on a diocesan level - I have led the charge to call a minister for full time youth ministry. Young people have great things to say to us all, and they help us to see the glory of God in fresh ways.

The fact that the new bishop will follow an eighteen year incumbency is both a help and a challenge. Stability in leadership often helps lay the ground work for more stability, but transitions are sometimes more difficult when things have been done the same way over a long period. Springfield faces many of the same challenges as other dioceses: strong feelings on both sides of the issues of human sexuality, economic concerns, raising up ordained leaders to minister in settings that cannot afford full time pastors, finding ways to reinvigorate churches with declining membership. This makes it all the more important that your new bishop spend time getting to know the people he or she is charged with pastoring; the action of forging new relationships can be healing and enlightening and empowering, opening up opportunities that no one might ever have thought of before.

The large geographic footprint of the Diocese of Springfield will most certainly be a challenge. As a member of a bishop's staff I travel quite a bit, but I also know how much more a bishop needs to be physically present across the diocese. Creative use of technology is helpful, but even more important is to be creative in getting people together face to face. I try to have business meetings electronically so that travel is reserved for ministry.

As I have prayed for discernment in this process, I am encouraged by what I know and learn about the Diocese of Springfield. I believe that tremendous opportunities are present in your lives that God will bless and multiply in the days to come.

7. Describe your understanding of leadership, particularly as it would be exercised as a bishop.

To talk about leadership in the church, especially when it has to do with the leadership of a bishop, I have to turn again to two images that Christ himself puts before us. First, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who watches, and protects, and seeks out the lost. Yet Jesus is also the sacrificial lamb who is willing to take the heaviest burden upon himself. Leadership for the Christian, then, must be built upon a foundation of vision, servanthood and self-sacrifice.

A bishop must be open to see the work that God puts before a diocese in any given season. I personally witnessed this over the past five years as my own bishop and diocese dealt with the washing away of former hopes and dreams in the muddy waters of Hurricane Katrina. In the face of a catastrophe that defies comprehension, the goals that we believed to be of utmost importance had to be re-prioritized almost overnight so that the community could respond to a new reality in ways based upon the unchangeable love of God. In Louisiana we came to see that our nightmare opened the door to a tremendous work of transformation, as a veneer covering centuries of systemic oppression suddenly was stripped away, and the act of ministering to the least of our brothers and sisters brought about as much change in us as in them.

Even in less than catastrophic situations, however, bishops face the challenge of gathering the community together in its various concerns, needs and levels of resource, and then encouraging conversation to build consensus and to articulate a common path toward a godly future. The leadership of a bishop must mirror closely the sacrificial leadership of Christ, which means, among other things, that personal legacies and agendas have no place in the life and work of a chief pastor. A bishop must have a clear sense of self to lead, of course, but that sense must be formed in community and focused on leading the flock to Christ.

Also, while the leadership of a bishop might be most often exercised before large groups, it is in the one-on-one relationship between shepherd and “shepherded” that something special often occurs. Jesus occasionally preached to thousands at a time, but most often he reached people in much smaller groups. He entered the homes of Jairus and Peter’s mother-in-law, he touched the eyes of the man born blind, and he ate at the table of a tax collector. Bishops are called to know, as much as humanly possible, the life circumstances of their flock so as to lead that flock appropriately. If a bishop is to lead and serve the people entrusted to his or her care, that bishop must encounter those people where they live and breathe.

8. A bishop is called to “guard the faith, unity and discipline in the Church” (BCP 517). How do you understand this charge as it relates to the current crisis and other challenges within the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion?

The issues we face today create strong feelings and often lead to deep hurt, regardless of the side on which we find ourselves. Each party believes strongly in their cause, and often cannot understand why or how the other could possibly hold the position that they do. This is nothing new to our age, nor to the community of faith. Martha of Bethany disagreed with her sister Mary. Peter and John had a great rivalry (we see that coming to a head in a foot race to the tomb of Jesus on Easter day). Paul and Barnabas, once the best of friends, parted ways for a time. Yet Jesus loved and ministered to them all. Any response to the troubles before us now, whether it be individual or corporate, must bear this in mind.

Bishops are, of course, charged with guarding “the faith, unity and discipline in the Church,” which means that they find themselves, more times than most would care to be, right in the middle of disputes of great passion, having to serve as both counselor and mediator. Bishops do

not have the luxury of thin skin; they may not, in good faith, act as if it will all just go away if it is ignored; nor may they substitute their own sense of right and wrong for the revelation of God.

I believe that there are several important principles that should guide a bishop as he or she works through the controversies. First, we are created in the image of the Triune God, a God who is by nature a perfect communion of persons. From this we learn that we, too, are intended to be in communion with others. When we separate from each other we are diminished as a community and as persons. In the Garden, Satan succeeded in his temptations only when Adam and Eve were apart.

Further, we learn from Jesus the lessons of humility and forgiveness in our dealings with others. The Son of God humbled himself to draw us into the Kingdom, and we must be prepared to set aside our own places of entrenched power. John the Baptist understood that he had to take a step back in order for Christ to be seen in front. Paul came to realize that he was the foremost of sinners, but it was that nature which Jesus would use as an example of mercy. Peter would deny Christ three times, but was given the chance by the risen Lord to proclaim his love anew that same three times.

Lastly, we must remember that when we are focused on doing the work of mission and ministry that cuts across all generations of the Church and to which we are called by Christ, all things find their appropriate place in our common life. Bringing souls into conscious awareness of the love of the living God through Christ will bring the victory that we all seek.

9. Describe your liturgical style; include in your answer your understanding of the place of preaching and the use of music in the liturgy.

Worship, first and foremost, is about entering into the presence of God; to praise and adore him, to thank him and to petition him for help. I believe this should take into account both the majesty of God and the unique circumstances of the community of faith gathered for this purpose. Worship should be done with intentionality, but should never be stuffy or done arrogantly. On the other side of the coin, worship should not be seen as a performance put together to entertain an audience.

I love the liturgy that comes to us from the tradition of the Prayer Books of the Episcopal Church and the historic Anglican Communion. There is a richness in our inherited language that points us to a God who wants us to be with him so much that he would set aside his divinity to walk the earth, to love, to laugh, to cry, to suffer, and to offer his life as a sacrifice. I love to pray prayers that I know have been prayed by others like me - and radically different from me - for hundreds and hundreds of years. Praying in that way makes me feel connected to the whole of God's Kingdom.

Preaching is something that I take very seriously, but I do like to use a bit of humor in my sermons. This is in large part because I think Jesus wants us to be able to laugh - - to laugh at

the world around us, and at ourselves. The purpose of a sermon, though, is to make the gospel come alive in the world of the hearers and as such is serious business. I find that I preach differently depending on the size of a congregation or the architectural layout of a worship space, but I always work hard to make the message be about the love of Christ and the life of peace and joy he offers to us.

St. Augustine wrote that to sing is to pray twice, and so I have always found music to be an important part of corporate worship. The style of music should be appropriate for a congregation, and should be done well. Personally, I prefer more traditional church music, but I also see great value in contemporary styles. Just as I like the rock and roll of the Rolling Stones, the Caribbean craziness of Jimmy Buffett and the blues of George Thorogood, so too do I find musical goodness in all sorts of spiritual styles. Some of my most treasured memories are of singing the gospel hymns of decades past when celebrating Eucharists in the skilled nursing unit of a local retirement center.

I often tell folks that we don't come to public worship to be fed, but that we come to meet God in a powerful way, in a way that we can hear him and see him and touch him. And when we do that, there is no way that we cannot end up being fed with the greatest of divine nourishment.