

The Rev. Rob Keim - Essays

Now that you have reviewed the Profile for EDSJ, how and why do you feel that the Holy Spirit is nudging you to accept a calling to serve as Bishop Diocesan to the diocese?

This past New Year's Eve/Day, Jeff and I came over to Fresno to wander, daydreaming about answering a new call to be the EDSJ Bishop. We saw four of the EDSJ parishes. I already knew a few EDSJ folks from General Convention, and I have several parishioners that have moved over from the Central Valley, including Mark and Susan Hall. The Profile was consistent with my initial impressions that the people of EDSJ have shifted the Titanic after many years of heavy lifting so that it is both traditional and innovative, both Anglo and Latino, both progressive and bridge-building. This non-dualistic way of being appeals to me for that is the way I also like to be, both...and.

The words of our Book of Common Prayer, since they are based on Scripture, have been used for thousands of year by billions of people. Both in joy and grief the BCP gives timeless words to our lived lives. Our traditional way of doing worship, organizing congregations, teaching both children and adults, serving, and being community, these all work in some circumstances and not others. I see that EDSJ is learning new ways to be the hands and feet and voice of Jesus in the Central Valley, and I want to be a part of that. I want both the old and new ways of mirroring God's love out into the world. Both... and.

The wisdom cycle of order, disorder, and reorder that we call life, death, and resurrection is creating new wineskins in the Central Valley. Data shows that a congregation becomes irrelevant when it no longer matches the demographics of the community around it. Our new wineskins must be more Latino and EDSJ has begun this work. Though I have had limited success in my parish, I am fully committed to this important guiding of the Holy Spirit. Hay belleza tanto en nuestra forma anglo-británica de hacer las cosas como en nuestra forma latina de hacer las cosas. Ambos... y.

I adore the phrase "commissioned to love" from page 17 of the Profile. As our prior Presiding Bishop said, "if it's not about love, it's not about God." Jesus calls us to love all with mercy, kindness and justice, for all are the beloved of God. However, we all know people define love in different ways, sometimes ways that have nothing to do with God. The three EDSJ Commissions are the ways I want to be love in the world. At the same time we are a big tent that makes room for disagreement. We are political about issues and not about people. Sometimes this seems like a watering down of values, but instead it lifts up the value of bridge-building. By being both progressive and bridge-builders we bring people along and actually help to usher in the Reign of God. Both... and.

Jesus had a third-way of being that is non-anxious and non-dualistic. I see those characteristics in the EDSJ Profile and want to be part of that love.

Describe a moment in your recent ministry that you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

I have been using my experience and knowledge of younger adults to increase this demographic in the parishes I serve. This is a carry-over from earlier careers in corporate finance, and talent recruitment & development in which I developed deep experience in teaching, leadership development, and program management. I spent the last three years of my 20-year corporate finance career leading talent development for the 2600 Finance employees of Cisco Systems. Focusing on the cultural characteristics of the "twenty-somethings", I reduced the attrition for the Gen-Y employees in Cisco Finance from 40% to 18%. The 3-year development program I ran for these 120 newer university hires was better able to meet the unique needs of these younger employees. In addition, I led efforts to use generational characteristics to improve our manager capabilities with all generations, improving communication, reducing friction, and increasing morale. I also created and led a leadership program for 40 of our highest rated Directors to prepare them to become Vice Presidents. Younger and older generations both need Jesus, and in my parish we have been there to equip them in our ways of following Jesus.

Describe your liturgical style and practice.

We deliver life changing worship as we glorify God. With joy we use the timeless words and actions that have shaped us for generations. My style incorporates the breadth of our Anglican traditions with an accessibility for those that are new. In particular I focus on worship excellence in the homily, music and Eucharist. You will see from our website that we use a side-bar style of bulletin that allows teaching since many of our people are new to liturgical worship. I use a Worship Committee to change our liturgy with each season, but as the Rector I make the final decisions. We cycle among the liturgies of the Church. The music director and I alternate every two months in the selection of music. I tend to select from a broader set of music resources. By season, we alternate between singing and speaking parts of the liturgy. I enjoy chanting the liturgy. Finally, I am again the Chair of our diocesan Liturgy Committee and craft worship for diocesan-wide events. During Covid this included online worship of which our 2021 Easter Vigil was the most complex. This service is on our diocesan YouTube channel, and 250+ parish worship services are on our parish YouTube channel.

How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

Healthy, growing parishes, like my current and prior parishes, are centered in worship, prayer and community service but also have a foundation in lifting up lay leaders who share their own gifts and ministries. I spent a year as the Director of Deacon Ministries for 124 lay-deacons at a mega-church (PCUSA). It is this collaborative experience that has fed my conviction in the ministry of all the baptized and the belief that the Holy Spirit abundantly showers gifts and abilities on those in our congregations. My role is to help folks identify their own spiritual gifts and put them to use. Sometimes I feel like the chief-recruiter and encourager. As we know, answering a call to ministry is an incredibly powerful spiritual experience. It strengthens a person's relationship with God and with others. It allows us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this world. I want all to have the spiritual experience of using their gifts, and I believe my proven abilities to form leaders enables this. That said, when it is time, I also freely allow and celebrate those who need to leave a ministry. It is a lot easier to take up a ministry when you know you can leave it when the time comes.

How do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

Sermon prep and study of Scripture feed me. Celebrating the Eucharist makes my heart sing. The presence of God and community is life giving for me. I am very blessed and am grateful to God. Each morning, as I awaken, I spend a bit of quiet time talking with and listening for God. To care for the gift of my body, I exercise several times a week. I read a lot. In 2024 I read 74 books. This is my main evening activity, and my tastes run from science fiction to mystery and from spirituality to historical fiction. Every 4-5 weeks, I spend time with my spiritual director. My husband, Jeff, and I have a healthy, loving relationship of mutual support and as a preventative measure we spend time with a marriage coach every 12 weeks. I do 20-minutes of meditation 5 days a week. As an extrovert, I enjoy and frequently do coffee, lunch or dinner with friends and parishioners. I sing baritone in the SLO Master Chorale and with Central Coast Gilbert & Sullivan. In 2022 I played a dead Bishop in Ruddigore and four years ago I was a lead in H.M.S. Pinafore. Singing is praying twice. I am a certified Master Gardener with a specialty in fruit trees.

Describe your involvement in either the wider Church or geographic community.

I have served two terms as Standing Committee President. I was on Standing Committee for our recent Bishop search, election, and consecration. I have served on our diocesan Finance Committee and led our diocesan Liturgy Committee. Last June I served again as a Deputy to General Convention. In a prior diocese I co-led a task force to re-imagine and rejuvenate our Deaneries and served on the Diocesan Council. For six years I was the President of Stanford Canterbury. I have been on the Board of Our Daily Bread, which serves more than 1000 lunches a week to the hungry, and on the Board of the Peace Academy of Sciences and Arts. Locally, I am involved with People's Kitchen, the Five Cities Homeless Coalition and Five Cities Hope. Also, I spent time with and developed relationships with our Mayor, City Councilors, Police Chief, City Manager, and most recently our newly elected County Supervisor. In 2020 I initiated and led an Episcopal clergy meeting with our local U.S. Congressman. My goal in developing these relationships is to listen and to share our branch of the Jesus movement and to advocate for a series of social justice topics that are important to the parish.

How do you engage in pastoral care for others?

At larger parishes, I can't cover everything and the training of lay leadership is critical. In my experience many have a fear in being inadequate when entering a hospital room or home. There can be some scary stuff, but I remind trainees that they are bringing God's love to people. It is a ministry of presence and listening, while also having boundaries. At my current medium sized parish, the deacon, retired clergy and I are the first line for the delivery of pastor care. In addition, since my arrival we have grown our Stephen Ministry program such that we have twelve Stephen Ministers with Care Receivers. And in my experience, those in our smaller parishes want to be part of a family where everyone belongs, participates, and is part of the family. That means as a clergy person I need to get out of the way so parishioners can feel surrounded by a community that cares about them. I also know from experience that we can make a tremendous difference in the community. For six years, I led a monthly worship at a retirement community for those who can't get to a church. For three years, I led weekly Evening Prayer at a home for those with Alzheimer's and dementia.

Tell about a ministry project that exists because of your leadership. What was your role in its creation? Who can be contacted?

I am pretty level headed and firmly believe that the best leaders are a non-anxious presence. I am told that I usually do this well. One of the things that breaks my heart is teen suicide. After five suicides at our local high school, I co-led my parish (and the other local faith communities) efforts to increase and sustain the health and wellbeing of our youth. We had public meetings with school board members in which more than two-thirds of the 175 attendees were from outside the parish. We chose to focus our efforts on getting our youth better connected with teachers and with each other. For the past 2 year I helped lead our diocesan Truth Telling Task Force for which I led the creation after the last General Convention. The team conducted a forensic audit of our Church's history with native peoples. After aligning on the history we can move into a period of reckoning and then healing, healing that is defined by the Tribes around us. Contact David Howard-Pitney (howardpitney@comcast.net) for more about my leadership.

How are you preparing yourself for the Church of the future?

I am an optimist. I believe the Holy Spirit is leading us into a future that is good, though sometimes it is like a dance in which we take two steps forward and one back. The Good News we have from Jesus in the Scriptures is timeless, and part of the joy we have as clergy is to share the Gospel. Of course there is endless study and reflection on God's Word, and every time I prepare and share a sermon, I am preparing for the future. I am preparing myself, and I am preparing the congregation. I am giving practical steps to move forward in the spiritual journey towards union with Christ. I am helping unpack the beauty that is already within. This is a message that is particularly relevant to our younger generations who have developed a deep distrust of institutions, including the Church. While there are common characteristics for every generation there are also unique gifts and challenges for these latest generations. Finally, to prepare for the church of the future I am learning Spanish and have classes weekly. I will walk 500 miles of the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain in late April and through May. I have led worship and preached in Spanish, though I am far from fluent.

What is your personal practice of stewardship and how do you utilize it to influence your ministry in your worship community?

Jeff and I tithe, though not all of our donations are given to the Church. I find that when I give generously it helps release the shackles of Mammon. God has blessed us in many ways. We are all called to steward the gifts we have been given by God. Being in 21st century America it is easy to fall into the trap of believing that I have earned these blessings. That eliminates God from the equation. Putting God back in the center reminds me to share my time, talent and treasure and to be a good steward of my health, environment and financial resources. I have a deep knowledge of budgeting and finance. I have served in two small parishes with an ASA of less than 50, led two medium sized parishes with an ASA of 125-140, and worked in one mega-church with an ASA of 4000. Different parishes have different financial challenges. I have an MBA in finance and more than 18 years of experience within corporate finance, business controls, and budgeting. I have managed teams of up to 30 people. With this experience, I have led 14 years of successful stewardship campaigns across 3 parishes with annual financial growth every year. At St. Barnabas our reserves have grown from \$60,000 to \$1,500,000.

What is your experience of conflict involving the church? And what is your experience in addressing it?

Conflict by itself is not unhealthy for it can be used by God to call us to change. I have been trained in Family Systems theory, in Living Room Conversations, in Appreciative Ministry, and with the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. I use the following to work through conflict: active prayer, remembering that all are the beloved of God, naming bad, and good, behavior when it occurs, avoid triangulation, collaborative decision making, over-communication, and change management. My experience ranges along the continuum from healthy to unhealthy congregations. In a prior parish we had strong conflict about our music program and about the amount of outreach that should be done to the surrounding homeless community. Though my current parish is healthy, there are still areas of anxiety, and at times there can be a need to heal from hurts. One area of anxiety was whether or not to sell an old Thrift Shop building and buy a new one. To lower anxieties I led community forums that focused on listening and learning. And regrettably, my ministry has not been devoid of personal conflict. I have had people leave the parish because of me. Each has been painful and a learning experience.

What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? What did you learn?

I have experienced and led a lot of change over the last thirty years including work process, organizational design, culture, and decision-making. Among others, I have been trained in and use the John Kotter method of change management. This includes the following eight steps -- (1) create a common sense of urgency and align the Parish around it, (2) pull together a broad-based guiding team, (3) collaboratively develop the change vision and strategy, (4) communicate for understanding and buy-in, (5) empower others to act, (6) produce short-term wins, (7) don't let up, and (8) create a new culture. And, pray. In my experience, change has gone better when there is broad support and I am not the only person driving the change. In addition, I find that it is very important to have parishioners feel they are part of creating the change and don't have the change imposed upon them. In my current parish, I have successfully helped us shift to be more welcoming of younger people and of those from other Christian traditions. I have been unsuccessful in helping us shift to be more welcoming of those from the Latino traditions. We certainly love our British-ness and all that goes with it.