

## The Rev. Dr. Greg Kimura - Essays

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*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?*

Applying to be considered for bishop isn't like a regular job. It is not of the nature that one aspires to or applies for. It is a calling and others have to see that potential in you. Rev. Tom Hampson approached me and I asked him why. He believes my multicultural background, nonprofit CEO experience, and time working in dioceses with urban and rural parishes makes a good fit. Rev. Debbie Low Skinner, former CTO for DioCal, and Ms. Trilby Conried, longtime church treasurer in EDLA, also proposed me for bishop, which is why they are included as references.

My professional background, ordained priest at 25 (30 years ago), serving in several dioceses as a vicar, rector, chaplain, professor, and CEO give me a broad background in the management, finances, politics, and growth of institutions dedicated to higher purposes. At the Japanese American National Museum I was a leader of the national community speaking. The main challenge was building up the organization, staff morale, and righting the financial boat. It was the same as a university department chair and serving churches small and large.

A bishop needs strong management and leadership skills, but of a specific type: as a first among equals, cultivating the laity and clergy in discerning God's call to them. This requires a deep prayer life and prudential judgment to deal with the difficult issues that always arise. It requires good speaking and preaching skills, but more importantly listening skills. A bishop should cultivate a discerning ear to understand where the Spirit is leading a diocese or church or mission and empower individuals and churches to bring it into being.

I believe the most important attribute is vision. A bishop should inspire others to bring the Good News to a world that is in sore need of Christ's healing and redemptive love. A bishop needs to lead by example and do so in a joyful and hopeful way even when challenges are daunting. Episcopalians are not known as evangelists, but we need to see our work as a new type of evangelism for a Christianity authentic to Christ's call to serve the broken world in his name. Practically speaking, this means reaching out to underserved communities and helping others to deepen their spiritual lives and hear God's call for transformation.

We are often told that the Episcopal and mainline church is in decline. I do not believe this. I always seek areas for growth, and have started up church outreach programs like Laundry Love and a Spanish-language service. (The latter grew to be the biggest Sunday service). The church has always lived in difficult times. They serve as inflection points to greater opportunities to share Christ's message. A bishop should focus this vision in concrete actions in a diocese, which I believe I can do in EDSJ.

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

I recently have been asked by a non-Episcopalian, non-Christian (Pure Land Buddhist) family ethnic to lead a memorial service because they had heard an online sermon. They felt I would be able to liturgically negotiate, include, and respect the different faiths represented in that family (Buddhist, Christian, and Jewish). The ability to negotiate religious diversity (and to speak compassionately to those without a tradition) while remaining true to one's own tradition will be increasingly important for the Church.

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*Describe your liturgical style and practice.*

While generally preferring high church liturgy, most of my career has been in churches that may be described as low/middle. This is to say, I am rather pragmatic in the sense that experience has taught that liturgy, including preaching, has to speak to the culture/context of the community and that a peculiar style cannot be imposed (even though it may be occasionally experimented with). This is a collective decision of the church and worship committee with the clergy. The most important liturgical emphasis across all styles of HC for me is to pray the liturgy intentionally to imbue a sense of awe and mystery in the sacraments. Receiving HC is the most holy moment of the week for most folks, yet it is very easy for celebrant and communicant to fall into a rote practice. In current position, overseeing praecentor and music director for the largest Episcopal Cathedral on the West Coast, I am comfortable with and have led everything from chanted Holy Eucharist and Evensong with Choir of Men and Boys, CCM midweek service, contemplative worship, and, recently, online worship.

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*How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?*

Most of my career has been devoted to ministry in areas with a shortage of ordained ministry, to the extent that many churches don't have Holy Communion on a regular basis. This has led me to strong feelings about promoting local ordination, partnered ministries (establishing regular visitation of clergy to those churches), and partnership with ECLA churches. It has also meant in practice an larger emphasis on lay ministries and the involvement of laypeople in ministry, whether visiting LEM or Morning Prayer/Evening Prayer, etc..

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

As bi-vocational priest with a more than full-time secular job as the head of a nonprofit ethnic museum (a job I feel is itself a calling), I find presiding and preaching on a regular basis to be a form of spiritual care. I have an active prayer life, spiritual advisors, and a soul-mate of a wife (for 24 years) who help keep me centered when the world gets too much in the way. I exercise several times a week and am an avid outdoor enthusiast, having grown up in Alaska. I find that regular, intentional time in the outdoors, especially with family, essential to keep mentally and spiritually balanced.

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

My experience has been extensive, as I am the rara avis known as the career clergy person, ordained 23 years ago at the canonically minimum age of 24, serving in the parish, university (chaplain and professor), and nonprofit administrator/executive. Please consult CV for a more comprehensive description. I feel it is important, even if a parish priest, to be involved beyond the particular parish in the life of the Deanery, Diocese, and wider community. In the past, this has meant community involvement in interfaith groups, social service groups (homeless shelter, Rotary), and community leadership (I've been a founding member and past president of an Asian American civil rights organization state chapter). I am a doctoral fellow of the Episcopal Church Foundation, which operates as a think tank for the national/international church.

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*How do you engage in pastoral care for others?*

One of the critical roles of the cleric is to serve as a spiritual and pastoral ear for your community and peers. Often this means visiting folks to bring HC to homes and hospitals. It also means prayer and pastoral counseling with folks. It is important for the priest to know his/her own abilities and limits, have other clergy to consult, and be prepared to recommend other resources (e.g. professional, licensed counselors) when the needs outstrip one's own capabilities. In the parish setting, I have found that being present, listening, non-judgmental, and compassionate immeasurably important. This doesn't just have to be in a formal pastoral counseling setting, but most frequently happens around a cup of coffee.

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

Two examples: As a priest, I led a small, storefront church through a discernment process to undergo a capital campaign, purchase a building, and build on a sanctuary on the way to moving from mission to full-fledged, self-supporting parish. During construction, fire destroyed it. It took another 3 years, starting from scratch, to rebuild. The fire itself was a tremendous trauma for the entire community, as our church also was the site of the food pantry covering the widest geographic region in the state. Through prayer, fundraising, planning, and a lot of sweat and tears, the new building went up and the church became the last to make the transition from mission to self-sustaining parish in the Diocese. I held off returning for a PhD program for two years and preached and presided at the first service in the new sanctuary before leaving the following week for school. I began bringing church and then university campus ministry groups to serve dinner at the largest homeless shelter north of Vancouver, BC. This ministry continues today and is the longest serving group at Brother Francis Shelter. It led to me being on the advisory board and capital board. Please see CV.

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

I am a keen student of the study of the different generations and the way they think and learn (the museum I head is going through a transition in membership, like the church). I've commissioned a couple of studies, the data and general results from which have deeply influenced my thinking on outreach, messaging, and how to connect to different generations, with the largest new mission field being hapa/mixed ethnicity individuals and families. The most important way I'm preparing, however, is not in thinking that is principally technological or delivery of message-oriented. It is in listening. Every generation has to figure out what its identity is and how it will relate to the fund of history and tradition of what has come before. The future church is always a work in progress and it will be by being open to the direction of the rising generations and the Holy Spirit that it will not only adapt but thrive and grow.

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

I'm a firm believer in the three T's: time, talent, and treasure. Having been involved in numerous building and capital projects, as well as annual campaigns and yearly stewardship, I have found that once one involves and values the first two (time and talent), the needs of the church (or nonprofit) will become apparent and the argument make itself for financial stewardship to do the important work that needs to get done. In my current position, I recently brought a nonprofit museum out of a half million dollar operating deficit, repaid 3 million borrowed from the endowment, and produced cultural programming to have the biggest attendance and revenue in the history of the institution. This was accomplished through fiscal discipline and management, but mainly through engaging a vision for the future that was value-based and which the community collectively believed in and, ultimately, participated in making happen.

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

We have just been through the most tumultuous time in the church's history in several generations, a period when good folks on different sides of the issues of LGBTQ ordination, covenantings, etc felt like the church they knew and loved was at threat. My last full-time parish was fairly conservative and, while several families threatened to leave, I tried to express in as prophetic a voice as possible that the EC is a "broad tent" church and that we may be the only place where people who differ on such issues can still find sustenance and reconciliation in a sacramental life shared together. No families left the church over this issue. On a parish level, another major conflict and on-going reconciling experience was over issues of environmental justice and resource development (perhaps a third of folks relied on the petroleum and allied industries for jobs). Here again, promoting the church as a place of dialogue and reconciliation (as opposed to the divisive political or public news sphere) established an important theological and moral space for the church. It was perhaps the only place where folks on either side of the issue could be in community.

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

Right after div school, I was called to a low church although having a more high liturgy sensibility and academic sermon-style.. I have to say I learned a lot about meeting folks where they are at rather than imposing a type of worship, even if well-meaning. I learned to find a good medium of liturgy that was still Eucharistic-centered, spiritual, and mystery-filled, and adapted preaching style based on the congregation (sometimes more academic, mostly more conversational and story-telling while being biblically-based). I started in my home diocese as the youngest priest by 28+ years and have always been seen as something of a change-agent in reaching out to younger generations (although now I'm 53). I think the most important change I've seen is the interest in the rising generations for a sense of tradition and depth in worship rather than the "guitar mass" direction that was seen as progressive in an earlier age. The most important lesson is to listen to folks and what speaks to them as people of faith struggling to make sense of a life of faith in an increasingly complex world and to involve them in the process of what the church and its worship should look like.