

The Rev. Canon Shawn Wamsley - 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?

The profile of the Diocese of San Joaquin resonates deeply with my experiences, passions, and sense of calling. Your transparency and self-awareness are striking, and the authenticity with which you describe your challenges and hopes is truly captivating to me. As I reflect on your profile, I am reminded of James 1:2-4: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." Your perseverance and faith are inspiring, and I sense the Holy Spirit calling me to step forward and offer to serve alongside you.

I am called to be a leader that ensures inclusivity and cultural diversity. My ministry has been shaped by nurturing relationships across a wide array of communities. I've had the privilege of developing systems of support and budget resources for our diocesan LGBTQIA+ committee. I have had the privilege of working with leaders and congregations worldwide, witnessing the beauty and strength of a Church that embraces the fullness of God's people. I also feel a personal connection to your context, as it reminds me of my roots in a blended, predominantly Hispanic family in a land where prayers for rain are as common as the grit needed to face each day's challenges.

I am called to be a leader committed to empowerment and innovation. Whether revitalizing congregations through outreach, navigating crises with compassion and clarity, or guiding communities through significant change, I have sought to help others discern their unique gifts in service to the body of Christ. Your vision to strengthen youth programs, deepen spiritual formation, and reimagine diocesan resources excites me, as it reflects a Church striving to empower every member to participate fully in God's mission.

I am called to be a leader who desires renewal and transformation. Much of my ministry has involved walking with congregations as they discern their next faithful steps, whether through conflict, growth, or challenges. Your hope for a bishop who listens deeply, leads courageously, and nurtures trust is at the heart of my sense of vocation. I feel called to journey with you as a fellow pilgrim, inspired by your commitment to steward your Episcopal heritage while boldly embracing the future.

It would be an honor to serve as your bishop, sharing in the sacred work of inviting, reconciling, and renewing the Church as we live into God's abundant promises.

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

I led the Bishop's team in reopening three closed parishes, one of which recently completed a remodel to serve the community better. This success was built on collaboration, vision, and perseverance. The process addressed challenges like limited funding, community resistance, and construction setbacks. We raised funds, engaged neighbors through community organizers, and found temporary worship spaces during renovations. This ministry's fulfillment came from seeing diverse groups unite to reimagine and renew these sacred spaces for a changing neighborhood.

Additional Resources: · ENS Article (<https://episcopalnewsservice.org/2021/12/09/diocese-of-pennsylvania-reopens-3-in-churches-in-5-years-by-rediscovering-their-communities/>) · CBS News Feature (<https://www.cbsnews.com/philadelphia/news/church-of-the-crucifixion-south-philadelphia-reopening-renovations/>)

Describe your liturgical style and practice.

I value reverent yet approachable, joyful yet structured worship. I'll smile at you, fist-bump kids, and wink at babies in church—worship should feel warm and inclusive. My liturgical foundation is the Book of Common Prayer, incarnational theology, and simplicity. I am drawn to the Anglican tradition, especially its choral heritage and liturgies like Evensong, which I find profoundly formative. My three children were all head choristers in programs that participated in the RSCM. While I would have never been asked to solo during Once in Royal David's City, my chanting is completely adequate. I deviate from the trend in many Episcopal Church settings, where preaching seems like an afterthought to the rest of the service. I cannot overstate the significance of preaching and strive for excellence in preaching at every one of our liturgies, whether it is a funeral homily or the sermon for Easter Sunday. Ultimately, liturgy is about the people—the participants who connect with the divine through shared symbols and collective experiences. My style adapts to the community's needs, fostering an environment where worship is meaningful and transformative.

How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

Ministry begins with belonging—creating a space where people feel they truly belong, not just welcomed. I actively invite participation by asking questions and observing people's gifts: "Would you like to read a lesson?" or "I notice how attentive you are during communion; would you like to serve as a lay Eucharistic minister?" These invitations build personal connections and encourage involvement. I also focused on who was missing from the table. Inclusion is not about involving everyone in everything but finding the right opportunities for each person. Those who tend to over-function are encouraged to mentor others instead of doing everything, creating a culture of shared responsibility. Ministry flows from our baptismal vows, and I see my role as facilitating and empowering the laity. Through mutual planning and discernment, I help identify and support ministries that emerge from the congregation, fostering trust and collaboration. I also ensure ministry well-being through donor cultivation, grant writing, and careful budget management. Collaborative stewardship and team leadership help sustain the mission and encourage deeper congregational involvement.

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

I care for myself spiritually by praying the Daily Office and engaging in contemplative practices, often drawing on Benedictine and Ignatian traditions. Manual labor, cooking, and repairing things also nourish my spirit since they can be vehicles for contemplative prayer. I maintain emotional health through professional support from a medical doctor, psychiatrist, therapist, and spiritual director. I also value relationships outside the church, quality time with my family, and my dog's (Argos) companionship. I am working with my doctor to improve my habits and stay active for physical health. Activities like working out with my wife, playing with my kids, and tackling physically demanding tasks help keep me grounded. I thrive when I follow a personal rule of life and maintain routines that balance spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being.

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

For the past six years, I have worked with the Compass Rose Society, an organization supporting the ministries of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), the body setting the Communion's direction. In this role, I have fostered global connections with church leaders and communities in the West Bank, Jerusalem, Mexico City, Rome, London, and York, organizing annual meetings, fundraisers, and pilgrimages to strengthen relationships and ministry across the Anglican Communion. My responsibilities have included managing teams across time zones to coordinate the Annual General Meeting, facilitating major donor development, and expanding membership to enhance the Society's impact. Since 2023, I have chaired the Steering Committee of the Jerusalem Princess Basma Center on behalf of Bishop Gutiérrez, supporting ministries serving children and young adults with disabilities in the region. Additionally, I've supported Bishop Gutiérrez at two General Conventions of the Episcopal Church and attended the Church of England Synod in York as his guest, where he presented the Diocese of Pennsylvania's ministry to an international audience.

How do you engage in pastoral care for others?

Pastoral care begins with presence and active listening. I provide care through traditional means, such as home and hospital visits and appointments. I also prioritize accessibility and transparency, building trust so that members feel comfortable asking for help. Many people initially hesitate to accept pastoral care, believing clergy are too busy, their issues are insignificant, or the realities of life are too embarrassing. To address this, I make a deliberate effort to be visible and available, creating a sense of ease and connection. Pastoral care is a shared ministry. I recognize that I cannot do it alone and actively engage others in caring for the congregation. Through training, support, and collaboration, we create a network of clergy and laity that fosters community resilience. As Canon to the Ordinary, I encourage priests to seek pastoral care from their pastor (bishop). Clergy connections to their bishop and self-care through the help of spiritual directors' support are the seminal points for all church pastoral care.

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

I led the development of Serviam, an online tool for training and equipping Episcopalians for ministry. Under the Bishop's direction, we partnered with Villanova University to create a complete learning management system offering resources, degree programs, and certificate opportunities at discounted rates. I was the project lead, managing a team of over thirty people, including staff, University stakeholders, and consultants, through development, implementation, and delivery. Contact The Rt. Rev. Daniel G.P. Gutiérrez for more details. Learn more: <https://www.serviampa.org/>

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

While the future remains unpredictable, my preparation centers on a deep trust in the Holy Spirit to guide and sustain the Church. I focus on strengthening the present by building firm foundations—planning thoughtfully and with phases, being adaptable, and remaining open to change. This includes re-examining our faith in the context of new challenges, standing for orthodoxy, and sharing the Gospel with humility and love. While embracing tools and technology to engage with a changing world, I remain committed to preserving what is uniquely ours as Christians. Preparation for the future is ultimately about living fully into God's sacred present. This preparation process requires clarity and decisiveness, particularly in how we deploy resources. By providing professional development for staff, bolstering stewardship, and emphasizing discipleship and formation, we lay the groundwork for the adaptability needed for future growth and success. At the same time, we must take calculated risks and innovate boldly. Growth and achievements result from dogged persistence and a willingness to fail and learn from it.

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

Having never had much financially, my stewardship focuses on giving what I can—whether it's time, talents, or even a heartfelt smile. My family practices a 10% tithe and pledges faithfully, prioritizing what is most impactful in each season. When time and energy are limited, I contribute financially; I offer my time and skills when resources are scarce. As a priest, I view all I have as belonging to the Church, balanced with my responsibilities as a spouse and parent. I regularly assess whether my contributions align with the Church's needs and what is reasonable to give. This stewardship mindset informs my leadership. I streamline budgets, eliminate waste, foster collaborations, and find ways to do more with less. I also recognize that donor willingness is shaped by timing, resources, and priorities—factors that influence my stewardship. By modeling intentional and adaptable stewardship, I seek to inspire others to give generously in ways that best serve their faith and community.

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

Conflict in the Church requires accountability and courage. Many issues persist because they go unaddressed or lack timely resolution. I've learned that firm boundaries and consistent accountability can prevent unhealthy dynamics from taking root. My approach is rooted in fairness, respect, and mutual accountability. While protective of my congregation, I also emphasize reconciliation and healing. Addressing conflict head-on can be difficult but essential for the Church's health. I've led parishes through conflicts involving poor stewardship, mismanagement, theft, sexual misconduct, and child abuse. These situations required managing staff, facilitating vestry retreats, and occasionally stepping in to oversee parish operations. Larger-scale conflicts have involved overseeing budgets, hiring consultants, managing contracts, and navigating challenges with public relations firms. Leading through conflict demands clarity and decisiveness. Living out a commitment to truth and justice often impacts relationships, expenses, and culture. While not everyone may be pleased, addressing conflict with compassion and resolve has restored peace and helped guide communities back to health.

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

Leading change in the Church involves navigating entrenched power structures, influencing key stakeholders, and addressing emotional and spiritual attachments. Success comes by uniting hearts and minds around a shared vision and enabling collective progress. Examples of successful change include:

- Casting Nets: Revitalizing ministries by expanding outreach and engagement.
- COVID Protocols: Maintaining connection and spiritual support through pandemic challenges.
- Revival Efforts: Developing programs to inspire faith communities and promote renewal.

When change has gone poorly, it often stems from inadequate communication, failure to address emotional impacts, or resistance to transparency. For instance, addressing clergy tragedies—such as sudden illnesses, deaths, or misconduct investigations—has required immense patience and empathy. People are often deeply attached to flawed systems or leaders, making change difficult. Key lessons include:

- Document everything: Clear records build transparency and resolve disputes.
- Simplicity and repetition: Clear, consistent communication is essential.
- Avoid distractions: Focus on the mission rather than engaging negativity.