

## **Application Form for the Tenth Bishop of the Diocese of Kansas**

**Full Name:** Helen Svoboda-Barber

**Preferred Name:** Helen

**Current Position:** Rector, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Durham NC

**Street Address:**

**City/State/Zip:**

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*Essay Questions: Please respond to the following questions, limiting each of your responses to a maximum of 500 words. Additionally, please answer these essay questions without providing any identifiers in regard to gender, race, familial status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age or any other identifying characteristic. Please refrain from using examples that include pronouns or descriptive language that would divulge any personal characteristics.*

### **1) How do you share your joy of being a Child of God with others?**

Joy is the first of my personal values. Sometimes joy is an outward and visible sign. At other times, it is more subtle. My joy stems from a deep and abiding knowledge that I am a beloved child of God — and that you are, too. This theme is repeated often in my sermons: "Know that you are a beloved child of God." When we really believe this to the depth of our souls, then we live with a freedom and generosity towards others and towards God's creation. I cherish Jesus telling his followers, "...that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11)

I share my joy at being God's beloved child by talking about it, modeling it, and tending it. I talk about experiences of belovedness and joyfulness in my preaching and in my social media posts, in my pastoral care and in my conversations in a check-out line. I model a life of joy by noticing beauty and humor in the world, appreciating the belovedness of others, and inviting others to notice, too. I tend to my joy by making time for regular refreshment and connection with those I love and allowing myself to be cared for and loved. Every three months, I take time to review my life to consider how I'm doing with each of my core values, and then create a plan for the next three months that allows for attention to the areas that have been lacking. In this way, I ensure that I am attending to joy in my life and my joy deepens as I continue to be shaped and formed into a unique, beloved child of God.

A number of years ago, I attended a CREDO conference for clergy. One of the activities during the 10-day event was creating our own personal list of values. We worked on this for days, trying out different words, changing the order, replacing one with another. I finally came to the just-right order for me: "Joy, Humor, Balance, Simplicity, Conviction, Beauty, Fidelity." These are the exact words that described the unique creation God made in me. Every three months, I take time to review my life to consider how I'm doing with each of these values, and then create a plan for the next three months that allows for attention to the areas that have been lacking. In this way, I ensure that I am attending to joy in my life.

## **2) How and why is the Holy Spirit calling you to lead the Diocese of Kansas?**

The nine attributes your profile lists as qualities for the next Bishop of Kansas are characteristics that match my gifts well. When I shared this list with my bishop, the bishop responded immediately, "I see all of these qualities in you." I lead from a place of passion and deep connection with God. I am comfortable with ambiguity and enjoy the challenge of working "outside of the box." I can be effective in the midst of conflict, and prefer to work together to get through conflict rather than ignore or avoid it. I encourage those I lead to try new things because either their efforts will flourish, or they will learn from a failure. Both outcomes can be success in their own way.

I rejoice in the possibility of working with the people of the Diocese of Kansas to seek out God and join in the Godly work that is already happening, and the ministry which is yet to be. As I read your profile, I resonate with a sense of possibility and a commitment to the future. The diocesan Alleluia Grant Fund, the collaboration around the Bishop Kemper School for Ministry, and many of the highlighted congregational ministries are signs to me that the people of the Diocese of Kansas understand that "church" as we know it is changing. These are signs that the Diocese of Kansas is proactively preparing for the future not by giving up or wringing your hands, but by investing in new ministries as well as supporting and encouraging deeper Christian formation beyond what is available in the congregation. As a leader, I look for signs of energy and health then encourage growth in those areas.

Your profile tells a story of a diocese that has good structure and bones, and is now ready to discover the next chapter in its story. I am excited when I read about your desire for shared mission and vision, and for meaningful collaboration crossing all sorts of boundaries. Having worked in an ELCA congregation and having a degree from a Presbyterian school gives me insight into interdenominational work. I have a gift and a desire to support and strengthen excellent leadership of both ordained and lay members of the diocese so that their gifts are more fully shared both within congregations and outside of the church's walls. I firmly believe that God is at work in congregations and towns of all sizes in the Diocese of Kansas — the Spirit has stirred up curiosity in me to find out more and to share the good news.

## **3) One of the chief responsibilities of a bishop is to be "chief pastor" of the diocese. What does this mean to you, and how do you see yourself exercising this part of episcopal ministry?**

Chief Pastor is a "both/and" role – one which understands the big picture and also is present in the lives of the faithful. If the Spirit leads us into ministry together, I will take seriously my responsibility to tend to the larger diocesan system by clarifying and holding boundaries, supporting health, and calling all into mutual responsibility. I also take seriously the chief pastor vows "to nurture and support the baptized, to nourish them, to pray without ceasing, and to celebrate..." (BCP 518)

If called as your bishop, nurture and support for members of the diocese will happen through encouraging collaborations across congregations, denominational lines, and geography. I will not just show up one Sunday every year or two. I will be with you midweek and participate in your ministries. I will go to Laundry Love, talk to a family who received a Red Box, and spend an afternoon sorting clothes with you at the Encore Shop. I will find out what God is up to in your midst, call attention to it, and support your ministries.

A chief pastor is called to nourish God's people. As your bishop, I will provide this nourishment both formally (e.g. Diocesan Bible Study) and informally (e.g. sharing a moment of beauty and grace on social media). By extension, this work continues through the diocesan staff as the Youth Missioner nurtures our teens, our Canon to the Ordinary supports our new clergy, and our Director of Communications highlights activities which build enthusiasm and excitement in our ministry.

The third task of a chief pastor is to pray without ceasing. This is what God has cultivated in my life. I would guess that I have between 300-600 moments of prayer most days. I am grateful for this sense of ongoing intimacy with God. I keep prayer lists and use prayer apps to give a small bit of definition to my prayer. I also

pray out loud for a person in their presence. Hearing someone speak to God on your behalf is powerful, intimate, and valuable. We don't do this nearly enough with one another, and I encourage the practice.

And finally, chief pastors are called to celebrate with you. Amen! The Eucharist is our central act of worship together. We come to the table to be nourished and refreshed, to share our concerns and our need, and then to be sent forth empowered to continue our work. As your bishop, I will be humbled to ask us all to "lift up our hearts" and I will rejoice when our deacons send us out into the world together, "rejoicing in the power of the Spirit."

A chief pastor loves the people, and shows that love in a variety of ways. If the Spirit calls us into ministry together, I vow to love fiercely and deeply. I will expect us to take our spiritual lives seriously and connect with one another throughout the diocese. I will pray for you, and beg that you pray for me. And we will celebrate God's presence with us, both in joy and in heartbreak; in the sanctuary and in the world.

#### **4) How have you led the people of God in speaking out about and taking action on social justice issues?**

If called as your bishop, I will use scripture, theology and prayer to ground my words and actions around social justice. I will share this model so that members of the diocese can come to their own conclusions about social justice issues based on their understanding of scripture, theology and prayer. My goal will not be for every one of us to come to the same conclusion –but rather that each of us can articulate the scriptural and theological basis for why we stand where we stand. And from that grounding, we each take action to improve the world.

My style of leading social justice is to lead from behind – to empower and encourage individuals to act on their beliefs and understanding of God's desire for the world. For example, shortly after arriving at a new congregation, a member took me out for coffee and told me how deeply affected she had been after attending a recent Racial Equity Institute. I listened to her story, and reflected the new call that seemed to be forming for her from this work. We then worked together to help her plan next steps both for her individual work in this area, and the ways she would invite participation from our congregation. I supported and encouraged her creation of book groups, adult forums, a support group, and requesting vestry participation in anti-racism work. As others joined her work, I encouraged them also by walking the path with them and by sharing my own stories and growth.

Social justice work sometimes begins by shedding light onto issues that once were hidden. When several members confided in me separately their struggles and loneliness dealing with anxiety and depression, I continued to pray about mental health and our congregation. Our deacon shared that he was also feeling drawn to issues of mental health. We created a team for a National Alliance of Mental Health (NAMI) walk, and almost a dozen attended. These walkers became our emerging Mental Health Work Group. Our preaching team has begun mentioning mental health in our sermons and a parishioner/therapist has spoken with our youth about anxiety, depression and self-harm. We now have a monthly Anxiety Related Group for anyone affected by anxiety. This slow development of support, advocacy, and companionship is a full-bodied model of taking action on social justice issues.

Sometimes I do feel called to take a stand. When I do, that calling always has its root in my prayer life, in my understanding of scripture and in my understanding of God and God's desire for this world. When it is time for me to lead from the front on social justice issues, I explain how I got there. I do not expect everyone to agree with me — in fact, I deeply respect those who end up in a different place but who are also able to "show their work" theologically and scripturally about how they got to where they are.

**5) We are a diocese of varied sized congregations who are continuously challenged to be adaptive to changing contexts and limited resources. Tell us about an experience where you, and those you have led, demonstrated adaptability in order to pursue the mission of the church?**

Many congregations are finding ways to adapt to new budgetary realities. I firmly believe Ephesians 4:12, that God does... “equip the saints for the work of ministry and for the building up of the body of Christ.” Sometimes, we must do hard work to discover and share the resources we have.

One congregation I led came to the realization that we were no longer going to be able to fund our ministry exclusively by pledges from the members. We did not expect any significant numerical growth in the coming years, but still felt very called to ministry as a vibrant congregation in the midst of a community that valued our work. Seeking ways to increase our income, the leadership team and I began with prayer and creating criteria with which to evaluate all ideas. Our successful initiative would:

1. Support the vision and values of our congregation.
2. Offer something needed to the community.
3. Use the gifts and skills of our members.
4. Be effective and efficient – earning a high rate of return for hours of service.

We spent several months brainstorming and soliciting ideas – both from church members and others. We identified dozen possible ideas including bake sales, art parties, donation requests to the wider community, rental property, tutoring, dog biscuits, gift baskets, and much more. The leadership team carefully and prayerfully reviewed these ideas and brought the ones that best fit our criteria to the vestry for their review. From these, the vestry chose not just one, but two new ministries to help fund our operating budget.

Drawing from a close relationship with the local college we were able to initiate a feeding ministry. The congregation provided meals for student athletes staying on campus when the food service was closed. The college athletic department was happy to pay for meals, students were happy for home-cooked food, and the parish was happy to make connections with students. As our parish budget grew, so did affection between students and church.

The second ministry was a parish homestay arrangement, similar to what we now know as AirBnB. Members with extra rooms in their home offered them to parents and families visiting the college, and payment supported the parish budget. Many families returned year after year and grew close with their host families creating another ministry of connection.

Not only are these fundraisers ministries, they are also evangelism. Your diocesan profile shared that there are some in the diocese who are interested in joining Presiding Bishop Michael Curry in becoming evangelists for the Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement in the Diocese of Kansas, but aren't sure how that can be done. I look forward to bringing my experience in linking ministry and evangelism to the Diocese of Kansas and exploring with you what evangelism means in your context.