



Jedediah Holdorph Autobiographical Statement

I am the youngest of six children. My father died when I was 13 months old. With few alternatives, my family moved to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) National Home, in Michigan. My mother later moved to Tucson, Arizona. She wanted a more normal family life for herself and her youngest children (my sister and myself) and she was determined to provide me with a chance for a university education.

In my senior year of high school, I began participating in Young Life activities, but the real turning point was an invitation to an Episcopal Church Camp after my senior year. Thereafter, I became involved in a college-age fellowship connected to Grace Episcopal Church, in Tucson.

I also met my wife, Barb, while at the University of Arizona. I was a pre-med student at the time, but put medical school off when we decided to get married after my graduation in 1980. (We celebrated our 35th anniversary on July 19 of this year.) A couple of years later, my call to ordained ministry emerged. In 1984, we headed east to the Episcopal Divinity School, in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Our eldest child, Rebecca Elizabeth, was born in Boston at the end of my first year of seminary. After seminary, I was called to be curate at St. Mark's-on-the-Mesa, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. That's where our son, Adam John, was born.

We have lived in many different parts of the country and found delights (and challenges) in all of them. As noted above, I was born in the upper Midwest and graduated from both high school and college in the Southwest. I attended seminary in New England and served congregations in the Southwest and Midwest before happily arriving in the Pacific Northwest.

Barb and I have also traveled across the US and to Britain and Ireland. On a sabbatical in 2001, I spent three months exploring our Anglican/Celtic heritage in the British Isles.

In 2007, I walked with parish youth along a portion of the Camino de Santiago. Last year, I walked the whole of the route across northern Spain with Barb. It was an amazing trip for me – filled with the beauty of the natural landscape and the joy of interacting with others from all over the world. I felt touched by the very different Roman Catholic/Spanish piety I encountered in worship and architecture. I enjoyed the mental work of speaking in Spanish, as well as the physical challenge of walking 500 miles in six weeks – one step at a time. (For more, check out my blog at www.jholdorph.wordpress.com.)

Over the course of 27 years of ordained ministry, I have served in many different settings. I have served in churches both large and small. I helped some congregations recover from crises and conflicts. I have always been active beyond the local congregation, meeting with ecumenical colleagues at home and sharing in “councils of the church,” having especially enjoyed serving as a deputy to General Convention in 2012.

Based on your reading of our diocesan profile and any other knowledge you have, what do you see as your greatest challenge as the bishop of the Diocese of Eastern Oregon? And what excites you most about becoming our bishop?

The Bishop Search Profile opens with a geographical description of the Diocese of Eastern Oregon: 22 parishes; 19 counties; 69,000 square miles. Obviously it's a big diocese.

The bishop must travel this vast expanse and connect the widely-dispersed parts into a unified whole, while being sensitive to Western values. The Diocese is stretched thin in terms of resources – finances, people, etc. The bishop cannot afford to confuse this challenge with poverty. We must unearth the gifts that are present and support the people of this diocese in finding new ways to further the dream of God.

I love this part of the world. And I love this Episcopal Church. As bishop, it would be my delight to explore more of that which I already love: the breadth and depth of the Diocese, diverse communities of faith, and the varied landscapes of this part of the country. What an adventure!

One of the strengths of this Diocese, it seems to me, is the willingness to find new ways to be the church in a new time. Partnerships in several congregations seem to have sparked good energy and opportunities. I would love to solidify such creative innovations and to work to create more and more partnerships.

Following this summer's General Convention, I am more energized than ever about the vitality of our denomination. It would be an enormous privilege to serve the wider Episcopal Church on behalf of the people of Eastern Oregon.

Please describe your process of discernment to this call. Share what was most helpful thus far. What surprises have you encountered? How will this process continue for you?

Last year, my wife and I walked 500 miles along the Camino de Santiago (an ancient pilgrimage route across northern Spain). My intention was discernment. I prayed for clarity. Instead, I discerned that clarity wasn't going to happen. Instead of clarity, each step became an open-ended prayer.

When the Camino ended, I quickly entered into dialogue with the Search Committee at Trinity, Bend. Their call to become their next rector soon followed – the answer to my walking Camino prayer. I believe my gifts meet the needs of this congregation and, in turn, I am energized by their gifts. Whatever happens next, I feel blessed to be here.

Friends and colleagues responded to my call to Eastern Oregon in ways both helpful and surprising. Many of them (from a variety of perspectives) suggested that I might be the right person to serve as both bishop and rector. (It's not the typical model of either ministry, of course, but this Diocese isn't a place for doing things a typical way.) I didn't come to Bend as a stepping stone to the episcopacy, but I am intrigued by the possibility.

What I didn't know a year ago was that the Vestry and Search Committee here were also thinking about a possible bishop/rector. That, too, has become a helpful surprise. In June of this year, the Vestry unanimously voted to nominate me.

Together we walk, seeking God's will for us all – for Eastern Oregon, Trinity, and me.

What experiences have been most satisfying and most challenging in your personal life and ministry?

Being a parent has been both the most satisfying and challenging experience in my personal life. Books and friends/family cannot prepare anyone for these challenges. Thankfully, I didn't know the enormity of it all before our first child was born.

Parenting is something we learn by doing. Our children were gifts, unique and wondrous, from the moment we first held them in our arms. Now that they are grown, I look at them with amazement. I am proud of how we nurtured their growth. They are astonishing and wonderful. They are gifted and they are gifts for us and for the world.

Parish ministry is much the same. Training and mentors cannot prepare anyone for these challenges. Thank God I didn't know the enormity of it all before my ordination!

I've learned from doing. Just as our children teach us to be parents, the people with whom I have served have taught me to be a priest. These congregations – whether a small rural congregation or a larger suburban parish or an urban church in a changing neighborhood – are impressive in their distinctive ways. I am proud of how I supported them in becoming more the people of God in their communities. They are all gifted and they are all gifts for this world.

(A specific experience, both satisfying and challenging, was taking a leadership role following the abrupt departure of the bishop in the Diocese of Oregon. We worked together and moved from victim to thriving survivor after that crisis.)

Describe your worship style. How do you envision yourself as a Shepherd to parishes of vastly different sizes and congregational vitality in the context of diocesan community?

I value mutual respect and clarity and process. I value tradition and innovation. I want my values to be expressed in all aspects of my ministry.

One of the first meetings I convened at Trinity was a meeting of worship leaders. I look for ways to involve everyone in our worship planning. People need to know why we do what we do. When I make a liturgical change, I want the people in the pews to know why.

I have a passion for education. I regularly offer instructed Eucharists and adult classes. I want our people to know the legacy that has been left to us. At the same time, I want them to know that this inheritance must change for a changing world.

In my preaching, I strive to be engaging and look for new insights. My task is to help today's People of God make sense of the ancient biblical story. I avoid pretense. I aim to be personable and authentic. I work in illustrations from our ordinary world and I use humor. And I'm flexible. My style varies from service to service, depending on congregational expectations and settings.

I believe that who I am as a person, my values and my personal qualities, would be expressed if I were to be bishop. I would continue to show mutual respect, to be clear, to respect process, and to value tradition while looking for new expressions. I would still adapt my style to various contexts and congregations.

What is one book (other than the Bible) that has greatly influenced your life? How and why?

Influential books are more than words written between the covers. We interact with the author, bringing something of ourselves to the experience. I've been drawn into that kind of interaction with *Western Theology*, written and illustrated by Wes Seeliger, an Episcopal priest from Texas. The back cover of the thin book describes it as a "word and cartoon sketch." It's not a dense theological treatise, though it is profoundly theological.

I think I first heard about it in a sermon given by a friend of mine, upon his ordination to the transitional diaconate – before I had yet headed off to seminary. I don't know that he ever named the book as such, but he introduced the themes from that book to me all the same. As for the book itself, my mother-in-law gave it to me as a gift – while I was studying at seminary.

Written in 1973, it is admittedly dated. The author hardly acknowledges women and their place in the church. He talks about bishops and clergy and layfolk, but says nothing to distinguish between priests and deacons. And yet this slim book still offers an evocative critique of what was – and often still is – the conventional theology of the day.

The setting for the book is the old West – the Wild West. Seeliger uses the imagery of that era to paint a vivid picture of two contrasting theologies: a "settler" theology versus a "pioneer" theology. Each theological perspective gives rise to a different understanding of what it means to be the Church and what it means for those who live lives of faith.

A settler theology envisions a church that meets at the courthouse in the center of town. God is the mayor, locked upstairs in the dark (peeking out at those outside). Jesus is the sheriff who enforces law and order. According to this perspective, clergy balance the ledgers and the people are obliged to obey the rules (and enjoy weekly ice cream parties on the courthouse lawn).

A pioneer theology envisions a church that moves in a wagon train. Rather than being holed up away from the people, God is the trail boss. Jesus is the scout, blazing the trail. Clergy are cooks who serve up food for people who are always on the move ... living life to the fullest, freed up from fears that would hold them back, and always going forward.

Long before I read about maintenance-minded versus mission-minded churches, Seeliger had introduced me to these different ways of thinking about what it means for us to be the church. And he also suggested that my priestly task is to cook food, hearty and zesty food!

What's more, the book teaches well. I offered it as a "story-time" reading over a period of several weeks one summer in Medford (when the regular weekly adult forum was on holiday). We enjoyed the satirical humor. And because the imagery is so clear and compelling, I believe it was helpful for those who want to reflect more on the life of faith and its implications.

Where do you see spiritual hunger and how do you address it?

A verse from one of the old spiritual hymns, "I Love to Tell the Story," begins:
I love to tell the story, / For those who know it best Seem hungering and thirsting / To hear it, like the rest.

Hunger is everywhere. That's not a bad thing, so long as there is food available and we have motivation to get it. It's better if we find something other than junk food, but I'd probably take junk food over some dry, moldy piece of bread. In the best of all worlds, I want something moist and fresh, savory and not too sweet, food that is tasty *and* nutritious!

My sermon preparation is certainly one of the ways I address my own hunger. I cast around for new ideas and insights, abundantly available from commentaries on my shelves and from commentators online. And at times, I've been blessed by clergy colleagues who share the task with me – making the experience a proverbial potluck.

But no matter what new materials I discover, I always return to the stories that are foundational for us. As the Catechism reminds me, we call the Holy Scriptures the “Word of God” because “God still speaks to us through the Bible” (BCP, p. 853).

Years ago, in the Diocese of Chicago, John Shea spoke to some of us on a Lenten retreat about the challenge of preaching through Holy Week. We read the same passages every year, he acknowledged. The texts don't change from one year to the next. The “trick,” he said to us, is to take a hint from our forebears who taught that the way through our familiarity (and boredom) was to return to the same stories and read them more deeply, and so discover anew what was always waiting for us there.

And I hope and trust that my preaching does the same for the hunger of people in the pews. People keep returning to church on Sunday mornings to hear the same stories we've been hearing in church for years, at least in part because they're still hungry – or, perhaps better to say, we get hungry again between meals.

It's my task, as I understand it, to serve up something hearty and nutritious (see previous question). I cannot abide simply pulling something stale and moldy off the shelf, so I hope to put some zest into the food we've been given. I want it to be nutritious. I want it to strengthen us for the work before us. Even so, it's not brand new; to borrow from that same spiritual cited above, we return once more to “the old, old story of Jesus and his love.”

As in sermons, so too in the classes I like to teach. In my teaching, as in my preaching, I find new inspiration in so much of our inherited faith.

I think that the world is hungry: for meaning, for purpose, for the Gospel (i.e., the “good news” of God's love). Too much of what gets said in the world isn't feeding people's hunger with good, life-giving food. Bad Christianity leads to people assuming Christians are bad people – judgmental, self-righteous, etc. That's at least part of the reason for our declines. Simply spouting more of the same isn't going to help. That's stale, moldy bread indeed!

I have a blog I call “The View From Here.” It's intended to share my personal slant on all sorts of things. On occasion, I'll rework a sermon and post it there. It's the same “old, old story of Jesus and his love,” but I offer it in the hopes that my view may help people hear the good news of God's love for them in new and life-giving ways.

To you, what is the most meaningful passage (*not verse*) in the OT? In the NT? Tell us why.

Many years ago, I was driving my two children to school and one of them asked, “Dad, what's your favorite color?” I wondered (and possibly said out loud), “Why do I have to have a favorite? They're all spectacular.” In the end, I answered that my favorite color was brown!

Forced to choose “the most meaningful passage” feels much the same. Do I have to pick just one? I think I'll go with something brown!

I'll go with something foundational, the first of the creation stories from Genesis 1 – and the brown mud where we begin. (It's red dirt in Genesis 2, by the way.) The poetry of Genesis 1 is enchanting. The rhythm of the passage, when read carefully, is stunning. (And if read at the Great Vigil of Easter during a thunderstorm, it's powerful.)

Down through the centuries, some Christians have taught that the world is evil and that our job in life is to be spiritual. By such a dualistic understanding of things, we should strive to be detached from the dirtiness of this world. But Genesis, right from the start, tells us over and over again that this world is

“good.” It tells us that God is not to be found removed from the world but that God delights in the muddiness of this creation. (And there is an implied mandate for us to be responsible for the preservation of this glorious gift, though the other creation story is more explicit on this point (Genesis 2:15).)

The sixth day describes the creation of the living creatures, culminating in the creation of humankind – “male and female” created in the image of God. According to our Catechism, “we are free [therefore] to make choices: to love, to create, to reason, and to live in harmony with creation and with God” (BCP, p. 845).

And at the end of that day, God says that it is all “very good.” While some say that human beings are fundamentally stained, I hear these words as an affirmation of the essential goodness/holiness of every person. As the old t-shirt slogan put it, “God don’t make no junk!”

As for the New Testament, I again will go with something brown! In this case, I’m thinking of the muddy waters of the Jordan River and the image of John the Baptist. All four gospels speak of Jesus’ baptism, and they’re all poignant – especially the Voice that announces that God’s love comes first, even for Jesus. But Mark’s account is unique and it has become particularly meaningful for me. As Mark tells it, John is baptizing in the wilderness and speaking of one who will come. And one day Jesus does come and he is baptized. According to Matthew, John tries to talk Jesus out of it. Luke tells us that John and Jesus are second cousins. But Mark never says that they’d ever spoken to one another nor even hints that Jesus stood out for John from all the others in the crowd.

Indeed, as I read this account, Jesus is just another man who gets baptized like everyone else. But then, at least from John’s perspective, this one guy pops up out of the water and goes “buggy-eyed” ... and then he runs off into the desert. Jesus is the only one who sees the heavens torn apart as the Spirit descends and it is to him only that the voice speaks, proclaiming him to be God’s beloved. And John? Well, John is left scratching his head about what just happened.

As I prayed with that Scripture on retreat many years ago, it came to me that my experience of ministry is very like that take on John at the baptism of Jesus. I do what I believe God has called me to do. I strive to do so faithfully. But for the most part I do not know what goes on inside the people who come forward. From time to time, I see tears in their eyes or smiles on their faces or other expressions that I cannot always decipher. As distinct from John’s experience with Jesus, I may have opportunities to follow up and ask questions, but I’ll never get inside the other person’s skin.

I’ve come to see this as an image of ministry. My task is not to control outcomes. My task is not to try to manipulate people’s reactions or even to know them fully. My task is simply to strive to be faithful to my calling to proclaim the kingdom of God that is coming among us, even when I do not know how that shall be, and to trust that the Spirit will move where it will.

Describe a scenario that encompasses your understanding of small church needs where there is no priest in the community. Please address your own expectations for meeting canonical requirements for ordination and how you might guide the fulfillment of many of our parishes’ needs for succession where they are unable to sustain traditional models.

I helped the parish I served in rural Missouri face the reality that it was spending too much of its resources to maintain its own full-time priest. In doing so, I made room for them to discover a new way of being the church. They eventually joined with other area churches to create the Northeast Episcopal Regional Ministry, a cluster of five congregations that share ministry, leadership, and resources. They’ve raised up a resident deacon from that congregation as part of a mutual ministry team supported by a priest who comes in for services.

Most of us grew up with an expectation that a church needed a building and a full-time priest of its own to be considered legitimate. The unspoken message suggests that churches exist to support clergy and buildings. But there are communities of faith that support mission without benefit of resident clergy (and

buildings, too!). I know a couple of examples from the Diocese of (Western) Oregon – in Drain and Cave Junction – who adamantly maintain such church life.

Some congregations may be served by bi-vocational or retired clergy. Other options would include mutual/total ministry models, raising up someone to serve as deacon or priest within the context of a larger community of faith. Either way, rather than spending all its resources to pay a priest to minister to the congregation, such congregations may be freed up to become ministering communities.

There is more than one way to be church. Kay Collier McLaughlin, in *Big Lessons from Little Places*, notes that 68% of Episcopal congregations (nationwide) have an average attendance of less than 100 each Sunday – generally deemed insufficient to support a full-time priest. But (as the title of her book suggests) she insists small churches are abundantly rich in valuable lessons, especially as the norm of smaller churches may become the norm everywhere.

Eastern Oregon already knows this. And I know about some of the creative solutions that have been tried in the Diocese of Eastern Oregon. One of the strengths of this diocese is our willingness to innovate. Partnerships, especially with ELCA congregations, allow for faith communities not merely to survive but to thrive. At the end of the day, vitality and vibrancy are better measures of a congregation than whether they can pay for a full-time priest.

Finding new partnerships can only help. The innovations in Eastern Oregon are a great gift to the whole of The Episcopal Church. We have a story to tell others. And we are surrounded by other dioceses with similar challenges. We certainly have something to offer them and they presumably have things they could share with us as well. I don't want to try to "go it alone."

We need not create everything we need from scratch. The Diocese of (Western) Oregon is sponsoring a discernment training workshop in September, for example. The workshop intends to help committees working with those seeking ordination and other kinds of discernment.

The ordination process is outlined in canons. Other diocesan websites can offer us a whole library of "discernment resources," including all the different forms needed over the course of the canonically-defined ordination process. Though the canons give us an outline to follow, we can still adapt the outline to meet our particular needs.

Technology can be a helpful ally in so many ways. Some seminaries support distance learning and online classes. Much of the formal education can be facilitated in this way, perhaps augmented by limited intensive experiences in a seminary setting. Education for Ministry is a valuable tool for all the baptized, and it might be used as a foundation for those seeking ordained ministry as well.

Thinking beyond this question's concern for "parishes' needs for succession where they are unable to sustain traditional models," I want us to dream about "parishes' needs for success" in the midst of a different way of doing/being church.

Most of us imagine an ordained person has to be able to do everything well – preacher, teacher, pastor, presider at worship, administrator, small group leader, etc. But the person who presides at worship need not be the same person who preaches and teaches.

And again, technology offers resources that may be especially helpful for smaller churches. The Episcopal Church has provided "Sermons that Work" online for many years. It's a free sermon every week. "A Sermon for Every Sunday" (at <http://www.asermonforeverysunday.com/>) provides a video sermon from quality preachers for just \$5 each week. The internet is a mixed bag, but there are resources that allow the strengths of small churches – connection, care and concern, etc. – be supported in ways that only a "privileged few" used to have available.

Or perhaps it would make sense to have the Liturgy of the Word be a shared experience of engaging one of the assigned readings, perhaps "Lectio Divina" with coffee in a parish hall, before continuing on with the sacrament in the sanctuary.

