

Jane Gould: The Essays

1. How do you deal with conflict? Give at least one specific illustrative example.

I deal with conflict forthrightly and directly. Certainly scripture teaches this way of living. If you have a conflict, take it to the person one-to-one; if they won't listen, talk to them with a couple of other people; if they still won't listen, take it to the church; and if their ears and heart remain closed, let them go. (Mt.18.15-17) And modern psychology affirms the necessity of engaging differences and difficulties directly.

I grew up in a family that never talked about important issues. My sisters and I taunted, teased, and had our skirmishes. But we never mentioned the coldness of our parents' relationship, the embarrassment of our crumbling house and yard, or the discomfort of our father moving in with another woman. Mom suffered silently and we devoted our attention to academic and athletic achievement.

As I moved away from home in my young adult years, I knew that I did not want to live life as a victim. Through years of intentional practice and the help of a good therapist, I learned to deal constructively and creatively with conflict.

During my MIT years, I worked with three different Lutheran chaplains. One year, their interim chaplain was a depressed middle-aged man. During a workshop on conflict resolution and aikido, I had the opportunity to act out the dynamics of our relationship. I demonstrated my bullying him, setting me off balance and flattening him. Aikido focuses on transferring energy and power. The question my peers brought to me was, "What can you do to keep yourself balanced and him upright?" How could I change my behavior so that we could move together with more strength than either of us could move alone? I returned to MIT with a new vision. Rather than punishing him for not being the colleague I wanted and needed, I worked with him to find ways to use his gifts. Not surprisingly, the better he felt about himself and his contributions to the ministry, the better he fared in areas of strength and weakness. Certainly, the aikido metaphor has helped me think through many difficult situations in subsequent years.

Five years ago, at Bishop Shaw's request, I entered a deeply conflicted situation at St. Stephen's Lynn, MA. I knew that my predecessor had confessed to an extra-marital affair with a parishioner and left the parish and priesthood without facing the congregation or bishop. The parish felt betrayed and abandoned by a priest they loved. After my arrival, I discovered that a multi-decade youth minister had been convicted of child sexual molestation in the early 1990s and the parish had never voiced their experiences, questions, fears, or anger. Beyond these betrayals of trust, deep suspicion surrounded the opaque financial management of the parish. In addition, people of color expressed deep wounds about the racism of lay and ordained leadership.

After a year of listening to stories, I worked with lay leaders and our Diocesan Pastoral Response Team to design a truth-telling process. Nancy Hopkins worked with us to offer the parish a day of "Remembering Our History." During this period, a significant leader in the parish who had served as both junior and senior warden under my two predecessors expressed anger about the whole process, accusing me of leading a "witch hunt." He threatened to leave the parish. He talked broadly in the parish telling lies about me and the diocese. Although his behavior bothered me personally, institutionally I was not concerned. I knew that healing could happen at St. Stephen's only if we had the courage to tell the secrets. Also I had a committed group of lay leaders invested in our truth-telling process. And so my approach was to continue our process unflinchingly while remaining in conversation with the

disgruntled leader. Although he slowly disengaged from the parish, his brother remained as junior warden and none of his family left the parish. And the parish itself flourishes as the old wounds have been cleansed and healed.

2. What pastoral situations make you most uncomfortable? Why?

I deal least well with whiners. I tend to be a person who assesses situations, evaluates options, and acts. I become impatient in pastoral situations in which a person or group mires itself in all that goes wrong and gets in the way of action. It frustrates me to have the same conversations over and over again because people are unwilling or unable to move on.

In Lynn much of my pastoral ministry focuses on survivors of abuse and people with a host of mental health problems. Recovery does not come easily for these folks; my willingness to spend time with these people sometimes stuns others. Yet, for me it is a privilege to journey with them as they strive to claim life out of the wreckage of their early years. Their steps may be awkward and small, and certainly they fall back. But they are not what I mean by whiners.

Whiners resist asking for assistance or making changes because they find some sort of comfort in complaining. One of my clergy colleagues recently published an article in the *Living Church* titled "Throwing in the Collar." While the article purported to be a critique of the church's lack of support for young clergy, it in fact amounted to little more than a whine about clergy not getting the respect or financial compensation we deserve. I know that I and several of my colleagues phoned this priest, took him out for lunch, and offered assistance. My parish linked lay leaders in our two congregations to build relationships and develop common programs. The diocese offered the Fresh Start program for new rectors. Undoubtedly, there's more his north shore colleagues and the diocese could have done; in fact, we've initiated a diocesan one-to-one mentoring program in part in response to his experience. However, rather than seeking assistance, he seems to have taken the Jonah approach of sulking under a tree and being "angry enough to die."

I have limited patience for righteous sulks. I believe that every day we have the choice Moses put before the people of Israel; we have the choice between life and death. Or as a graffiti in the Boston subway once put it, "If the choice is to sit in the sand or to dance, why not dance, mother, why not dance?"

In pastoral care, I encourage the joyful and the depressed, the healthy and the dying, the successful and the struggling to choose life each day in whatever way they can. Those who whine and willingly hand themselves over to despair tax my patience.

3. What has been your most valuable learning experience in ministry outside of your current primary ministry?

Several months into my tenure as Episcopal Chaplain at MIT, I found myself disheartened. I phoned my Boston University colleague, the Rev. Jep Streit, and said, "Jep, no one would notice if I disappeared. No one cares that I'm here. I mean the students might wonder what happened to Wednesday night worship but they'd just stop coming. They wouldn't call the bishop or anything." Jep waited a bit to let my words sink in and then he replied, "Welcome to campus ministry."

As Episcopal Chaplain at MIT, I found myself marginal both to the Institute and to the diocese. Coming to campus ministry from seven years in parish ministry, I'd grown accustomed to being clergy in a

parish. Try as we might to share power in the parish, clergy hold a central position in our parishes. In all my ordained ministry, I had been at the center of the institution I served.

While I'd never thought of myself as needing to be the center of attention, I found myself struggling to make sense of life on the margins. I spent a lot of time praying that fall. I reflected on James and John wanting positions of privilege on the right and left of Jesus and being reminded that Jesus doesn't call us into that kind of glory. Slowly I realized that God had brought me to MIT to learn truly to ground the Gospel within myself. My confidence and faith needed to be tested in a place where few external supports existed. I needed to learn to live my faith boldly on the margins.

I now credit MIT with making me an "out Christian." I am a cradle Episcopalian. While I don't think I ever was one of God's "frozen chosen," I know I'd spent my life as a silent supporter of Jesus. Episcopalians simply didn't talk about our faith, at least not in my circles.

I realized quickly that MIT needed to hear the good news of the Gospel and that I had a responsibility to speak it. In the competitive and judgmental world of MIT, students, faculty and staff needed to know that they are made in God's image, fully acceptable and loved. In a community that insists that people prove their worthiness, the radical hospitality of the Gospel announces that all are worthy by the grace of God. Come unto me all you that are carrying heavy burdens and I will refresh you.

After I'd been at MIT a couple of years, we faced a string of tragic deaths on campus. One cool October night, a group of students organized a candlelight vigil to honor a freshman who died of alcohol poisoning. The chaplains mingled in the crowd and stayed in the Chapel for any who came to pray. Few crossed the moat around the Chapel to enter and pray. As the vigil ended, students didn't know what to do with their candles. And then first one, then dozens, then hundreds walked to the moat and stood their candles on the stone wall. The reflected lights danced in the water. They'd created sacred space.

In that moment I understood that my calling is to preach the good news not just to those who are comfortable crossing the moat, but to those who stand outside it, to those reaching for the holy in their own time and place.

In addition, MIT taught me the necessity of claiming the name Christian for progressive people with a passion for justice. As Coordinator of the Technology and Culture Forum, I had the opportunity at MIT and ultimately throughout the world by webcasts to offer dialogue on critical issues of our time. Our programs addressed the moral and ethical implications of scientific discovery and technological innovation. Standing in my black shirt and collar in front of crowds of hundreds, I had the chance to focus attention on the real moral and ethical challenges of our time.

I emerged from my MIT years a far more confident and grounded Christian. While neither the diocese nor MIT regarded me as essential, I knew that my place on the margins enabled me to bring the gold of the Gospel to the Institute and the challenges of the world to the church.

4. Tell us about a difficult situation in your ministry which you felt you did not resolve very successfully. In retrospect, what would you have done differently?

When I arrived at St. Stephen's, Lynn, the parish had just experienced tremendous loss. Their beloved rector betrayed and abandoned them. Their wonderful assistant had retired six months before the rector departed. Two months after the Rector left, the former assistant's husband died and nine months later,

on my first day in the office, she died of a heart attack. And the subsequent Good Friday, the former Senior Warden died after a valiant struggle with cancer.

I knew from the beginning of my tenure that my office staff had been hired for pastoral not professional reasons, but I feared that neither they nor the parish could bear more loss. I kept them. After a year, I restructured the office to save money and to require more accountability from both administrators. I actually hoped that the significant reduction in hours would result in them quitting. Needless to say, neither resigned, but their passive aggressive retaliation increased. Lay leaders, including the wardens, treasurer and clerk complained about the lack of professionalism.

Our parish administrator team needed to be fired so that we could hire non-parishioners with computer skills. We also needed one person handling the job so that balls couldn't be dropped or hidden between the two. I delayed and delayed. I worried about what would become of our employees if we stopped taking care of them. And I used the excuse that the time was not yet right.

What I know now is that I do not do anyone favors by keeping people in jobs they can't do. My paternalism in maintaining these two women in part-time jobs for which they lacked the requisite skills made me resentful and prevented them from getting on with their lives. I could tell anyone that parochial charity is never administered appropriately through the payroll, but I did it for years. Although letting them go sooner would have created hard moments for them, me, and the parish, we all could have moved on. My own need to protect them prevented me from doing what needed to be done for the parish and for our two administrators.

5. Based on your reading of the Diocesan profile:

A. what do you see as your greatest challenge as bishop of California?

B. what excites you most about the position?

A. The bishop who ordained me to the priesthood committed suicide. In the years preceding his death, he engaged in inappropriate relationships, offered inconsistent leadership, and preached of being in the desert. We all witnessed his decline, but none of us knew how to intervene. The first Episcopal election in which I participated resulted in the consecration of Barbara C. Harris. Through the Episcopal Women's Caucus, we organized and educated to create the possibility of electing a woman bishop. Barbara served Massachusetts and the church with great courage and commitment, but the personal costs for her were high.

In recent years, as people have begun to approach me about running for bishop, I've started considering the lives of bishops. At a glance, I'd say they work too much, often become isolated from family and friends, drive long distances, and spend most of their time dealing with difficulties of parishes, priests and people.

The greatest challenge for me would be figuring out how to be a healthy, constructive, and creative bishop. I know my tendencies to overwork and would have to strive diligently to maintain balance. My family is essential to my sense of balance and our challenge would be staying connected as John retires and Sam and Gardy look to college and career. Friends also keep me balanced. Having served only in the Diocese of Massachusetts, I would need to form a new church community in California. Luckily, I do have a significant circle of non-church support in the Bay Area because several of my closest Stanford friends live in San Francisco. Prayer, exercise, and quiet also are essential to me staying

grounded. I can't help but think that the foothills and beaches as well as the monastic communities and educational institutions of the Bay Area will make it possible to meet these needs if I'm attentive.

B. The profile of the Diocese of California excites me because I see myself and my gifts for ministry reflected in it. The words of your profile are the words of my life. **Diversity...** I'm Rector of a parish with people from more than 20 countries on a given Sunday. We worship regularly in English and Kiswahili, and Spanish occasionally. I've led anti-racism trainings and diversity workshops. **Young adults...** I spent six years as chaplain at MIT. I nominated from the floor of General Convention and organized to elect a young adult to the Executive Council of the national church. One of the recently identified mission imperatives of my parish is "showing Christ-like hospitality to young adults." **New church plants...** In October, a declining urban, anglo congregation will open its doors to a new East African Anglican congregation. Our Lynn Kiswahili congregation is sponsoring this church plant. **Justice...** My affiliations with the national Episcopal Urban Caucus and diocesan Episcopal Women's Caucus speak to my commitments. At General Convention, 2000 and 2003 I served on the steering committee of The Network, an affiliation of the progressive organizations in the Episcopal Church. **Interfaith...** My MIT years involved me in a challenging and inspiring interfaith ministry based in MIT's Religious Activities Center. Currently, I serve on the Board of ECCO, the Essex County Community Organization, that gathers faith communities, unions, and community organizations to work together for positive social change. **Secular society...** Few communities reflect the highly technological, secular culture of the 21st century more than MIT; I welcome the challenge of being an "out Christian" in the similar culture of the Bay Area. **Camp...** In 2003 Massachusetts completed the Barbara C. Harris Camp and Conference Center. As a Council member, I've learned the challenges of its administration, as a priest I've enjoyed serving as a summer camp chaplain, and as a Mom I've watched it shape my sons. **Fund raising...** Thanks to the Episcopal Church Foundation, chaplains in my era received fund raising training and technical support. I established annual campaigns to support the Episcopal Ministry and Technology and Culture Forum, and launched a million dollar capital campaign for T&C. **Community engagement...** Just as my parish seeks to respond to the needs of our city through advocacy, direct service, community development and cultural celebrations, I see the Diocese of California making a similar difference on a much larger scale.

California seeks a bishop with vision and courage who has the ability to motivate, to invite others into shared leadership, and to provide coherence between vision and program. Given the priorities and commitments of the Diocese of California, I believe that I could be this person.

5. What have you found most compelling in Christ's call to you? How is this related to your interest in becoming the bishop of California?

When I applied to seminary and for postulancy, I felt called to ordained ministry but I could not have told anyone why. In my applications, I wrote all the reasons I'd be a good priest. Either my arguments were convincing or wiser heads saw more between the lines than I had the ability to name.

What I have found most compelling in Christ's call is that I am constantly being transformed, and I never know what's coming next. My relationship with the Society of St. John the Evangelist and especially with Tom Shaw as past spiritual director and current bishop has helped me grow in my relationship with Christ and to open myself to the movement of the Spirit. Experiences of the divine in relationships with family, friends, colleagues, and parishioners have drawn me closer to God in celebration and struggle.

Over the last several months, colleagues have suggested that I consider whether God might be calling me to be bishop of California. Through the summer, I told them I appreciated their confidence in me but that it really wasn't quite the right time and maybe I didn't really want to deal with being a bishop anyway. As the possibility kept asserting itself, I kept pushing it down. A week ago, a group of four recently or soon-to-be ordained folks in the Diocese of Massachusetts approached me. They are a group that gives me hope for the church; they are young, passionate, hard working, and reflect the diversity of our community. All they said was "The church needs you to step up. If not you, who?"

Although I can think of all sorts of answers to their question that don't involve disrupting my life, they all emerge out of my desire to control my life and my fear of entering an episcopal search process. When Bishop Shaw asked me to go to Lynn, my first response was "You're not going to solve your problems by disrupting my life." He replied, "Just pray about it." I prayed and I went to Lynn.

This week I've prayed. I've never done a job search; I've never used a CDO profile. But I have learned to pray when possibilities present themselves. As I've prayed this week, I've grown excited. Might this be of God? Actually, California makes sense for me. As the product of a California father and east coast mother and as a Stanford graduate, I'm bicoastal and have always been clear that I hoped to return to California. The profile of the diocese and the demographics of the Bay Area speak to me. What's not compelling about the possibility of leading a diverse, progressive, and vital Diocese with a tradition of prophetic bishops? And so I say, "Here I am, Lord. Send me."