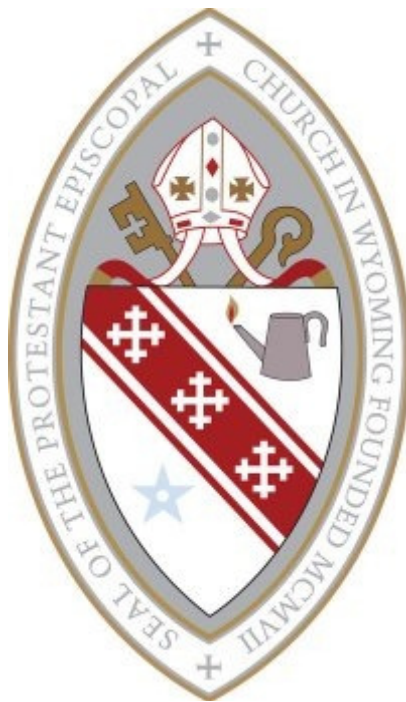


ESSAY ANSWERS



**Nominees for the 9th Bishop
of the Episcopal Diocese of Wyoming**

THE REV. CANON MARGARET BABCOCK



Wyoming is a rural state, our residents are aging, much of our population is transient and we encompass a wide range of socioeconomic groups. How does your training and experience prepare you for our geography and demographics?

I have spent all 29 years of my ordained ministry in the American West. Taking in the scenery while driving has become as recreational to me as camping, hiking and cross-country skiing! I have grown to love not only its vast and wild beauty, but also the unique character of the Episcopal Church in this part of the country. There is still in the western church a pioneering spirit which allows us to seek different ways of doing things, while valuing and building on our roots. We are, as one region depicted the diocese, a crazy quilt of different communities and peoples. I find great beauty in that quilt and rejoice in it. The challenge is to keep it sewn together in God's love!

While Wyomingites exhibit an independent streak, I have also come to appreciate a sense of community here, best expressed in the historical concept of Rendezvous. This image of people gathering from all corners of the wilderness to trade goods and share their stories is one which I would emulate in the Church. Rendezvous is where transients may connect to long time residents like Native Americans and ranchers. This is where the young may find the histories and skills of the old worth learning, while sharing their own perceptions of the world. There is something about this dance between individual and community in Rendezvous which seems to me to be healthy and intriguing...an insight into our relationship with God, lived out both individually and as Church.

How would you support and strengthen our community, balancing the needs of our Mutual Ministry congregations guided by regional Ministry Developers, with the needs of the Rector-led congregations?

This is the most important question facing us in our diocese and involves not only partnering and rector-led churches, but also Native American congregations and those who have not opted to partner, yet have no rector. All these communities of Christ are valid and important to our ability to live into the Gospel. But how do we encourage a spirit of cooperation, indeed interdependency, to increase collaboration? The answer lies in pursuing both deeper communications between all types of congregations and in clarifying the baptismal theology which is embraced here.

I am a great believer in technology which allows people to more easily connect over great distances. However, good communication is dependent on solid relationships...and those take time, some face to face meetings, and the intention to belong to each other. To that end, I introduced the concept of Apostolic Teams, encouraging relationships between leaders of all our unique congregations in each region.

I believe an important topic for exploration in these teams will be defining baptismal theology and exploring together how to reflect that theology most faithfully in each church culture. Such dialogue would diffuse any present tension around how we "do" church and get us to reflect creatively, from different perspectives, on living into our shared relationship with God.

Time will tell whether the Apostolic Teams develop into helpful arenas for building bridges, but I am committed to finding a way to deepen relationships and have all our churches secure in their identity as a part of this diocese.

Our congregations have a rich history of Christian outreach. Tell us about your experience in Christian outreach.

Experience has taught me three things about outreach ministry: First: Mission to others is a necessary ingredient for vitality in congregations. When I worked with small churches in Idaho, I developed a formation program that encouraged groups to ask what God was calling them to do. The mission projects which followed their communal “rule of life” (from raising money for children’s books distributed to new parents to holding rural health fairs) invariably gave a sense of connection with God’s will that energized congregations and opened them to the communities surrounding them.

Second: As many parishioners as possible need to be involved in mission, for it to be sustainable and life giving. As rector of St. Matthew’s in Tucson, I brought in community organizing techniques which taught us to discern mission opportunities in our community. We planned those ministries as teams and then included the majority of our members in the outreach work. I designed a much simpler process of discernment for our Mustard Seed Mission project in Wyoming, with the hopes that many of our congregations would begin those projects with wide involvement of their membership.

Finally: We can do more good together, than we can alone. The community organizing tools I first used with a single congregation have been invaluable in bridging between congregations to build power to do extraordinary outreach ministries. For example, a regional group of nine parishes in Idaho was able to mobilize the whole diocese to invest in ministry with the growing Latino population.

Our congregations want to grow. Tell us about your experience in growing congregations.

I experienced church growth, both in my years as rector where we built a new sanctuary and in my work with small rural congregations. What I learned is that growth which is sustainable and healthy occurs in congregations more concerned with being God’s partners than counting people in the pews. Anxiety about survival is not helpful. Excitement about mission is much more attractive. While this may sound idealistic, it is in fact the very difficult (but ultimately joyful and nourishing) work of the Church.

What makes this work possible is two-fold: First of all processes and resources are needed to do deep on-going work in congregations which forms both vision and leadership. There is no “one size fits all” formation program. Instead, I have found that, as long as a congregation understands that there is no quick fix and will grapple honestly with who they are called to be by God, progress is made. Resources may be needed from outside sources by even the richest of congregations, and here the Diocese has the opportunity to live out its calling to nurture and support its churches, providing what is truly required to grow in vitality.

Secondly, evangelism is also needed. Traditional evangelism techniques have never been very compatible with our Episcopal culture. We must discover new ways. Building on the insights of the emergent church movement (which our Wyoming Evangelism team is doing) will help us share the stories of God’s presence and invite others to embrace their place in God’s family.

THE REV. REBECCA “BECKY” BROWN



Wyoming is a rural state, our residents are aging, much of our population is transient and we encompass a wide range of socioeconomic groups. How does your training and experience prepare you for our geography and demographics?

My call to priesthood has been shaped by small, struggling parishes. The first Episcopal churches I attended were both located in communities hard-hit by layoffs in the steel industry in Pittsburgh. These parishes, geographically isolated in communities with aging residents and high rates of poverty, had difficulty supporting clergy and other staff; one was a designated mission parish, receiving diocesan support. Within this setting, I first understood my vocation as one of enabling the ministry of the laity. I have been deeply involved in the study and practice of congregational development, especially in terms of how we move away from traditional, hierarchical models for decision-making. Within the parishes I have served, I

have helped people identify their own passions for ministry, then supported them with the resources to help make them effective in their work. Working with other parishes and clergy, I have developed training materials for lay facilitators, offered presentations and led discussions with clergy about how we might work more effectively with our congregations--especially those parishes that have a history of conflict with clergy.

My ministry has been almost equally divided between urban and small community settings, and even in Massachusetts, where the distances may look small on the map, the time spent driving can be significant. Since 2001, though, my husband and I have been traveling regularly in Wyoming; we have both fallen in love with the wide open spaces and the rugged geography, and have come to deeply respect the people who live there.

How would you support and strengthen our community, balancing the needs of our Mutual Ministry congregations guided by regional Ministry Developers, with the needs of the Rector-led congregations?

The most effective way to strengthen a faith community is through practice: praying and worshiping together; studying and reflecting on scripture and our tradition; serving together; and giving generously--of our time, our treasure, and our spirit. Through our practice, we come to know one another better as people of God: we embrace one another's hopes, we honor one another's fears and sorrows, and we discover how best to support each other in this journey of faith.

Strengthening the community first requires helping people to find and define their work, then helping them develop the resources to accomplish their vision. Next, we must provide ongoing coaching for our leadership, as they help to facilitate the community's practice of worship, study, service, and stewardship. This work of coaching is the task for seminary-trained clergy, in both Mutual Ministry and Rector-led congregations.

The first step in community coaching asks, "What is your desired outcome?" Then we ask: "What are the resources we need to get there? and "What are the gifts we have to share with others?" Each congregation must answer these questions individually, but we then need to come together to share our work with others, to be encouraged and supported, and to offer our prayers, insight, and presence to one another.

Strengthening the diocesan community requires strengthening both individual congregations and strengthening the working relationships among them. This is, in my view, the primary work of the Bishop and the Diocesan staff and committees.

Our congregations have a rich history of Christian outreach. Tell us about your experience in Christian outreach.

The opportunity to participate in Christian outreach drew me back into the church as a young adult. When the steel mills began laying off workers, I helped to organize and run a "Mother's Day Out" program two days a week for women in Homestead, Pennsylvania, with Bible study, crafts, childcare, and conversation. As a newly ordained priest, I met with people who came to Trinity Cathedral asking for help--for transportation, a bag of groceries, a prescription, a comfortable place to sit, or someone to listen. In Worcester, Massachusetts I tutored children for whom English was their second language, developed an outdoor arts and crafts program, and organized a neighborhood vigil after drive-by shootings.

All of these experiences taught me respect and admiration for the people I was serving: for women who face economic insecurity with resilience and wisdom; for the poor who meet daily scorn with dignity; for people of different cultures who face suspicion and distrust with determination and courage.

In helping others to develop outreach efforts, I encourage people think about outreach by first identifying what it is we have to share, and then look for ways to enter into partnership with those to whom we might offer our gifts. For Christian outreach is more than just charity, and we are to be more than just caretakers of those less fortunate. By serving others, we are invited to become sisters and brothers with those we serve and to grow in compassion for all of God's creation.

Our congregations want to grow. Tell us about your experience in growing congregations.

I believe that all people and congregations desire to grow, to learn new, more effective ways of being who they are called to be. I am deeply concerned, however, by our usual measures of growth--Sunday attendance and budget size--and the expectation that, when "fully grown," all congregations will look pretty much alike.

In my experience with congregations that want to grow, I find it extremely important to describe what we mean by growth. Many churches, and smaller churches in particular, tend to define themselves in terms of their deficiencies--what they don't have. To grow, a parish needs to identify what is already working, to name the assets they already have, and then to look for ways to nurture these gifts for ministry. I have also found that growth requires embracing change, and that change requires hard work, sustained over a long period of time. My most profound experience with assisting a congregation to grow has been in my current parish, where I have worked over the last eight years to reestablish trust after many years of conflict. Now, after much time spent listening to one another, working on smaller projects, sharing our hopes for the future and putting aside the grief of past failures, we were able to renovate our building and, finally, welcome new families into our community.

All growth is given by God for the purposes of God; doing our part requires that we remain open and responsive to new invitations to service.

THE REV. SANDRA CASEY-MARTUS



Wyoming is a rural state, our residents are aging, much of our population is transient and we encompass a wide range of socioeconomic groups. How does your training and experience prepare you for our geography and demographics?

Life itself is a hot house for transformation. Endowed with Irish curiosity and German determination I have never hesitated to engage life with both excitement and respect. Learning from my mistakes, and “picking up stakes” when necessary are familiar traveled territories. My life’s challenges regularly required disciplined, prayerful discernment as actions are followed by consequences. I am a fast learner. My rhythm and practice of seeking God and responding to Jesus’ discipleship call is to stop, look, listen, weigh pros and cons, consult wise elders, ponder options, consider ramifications for others, and ultimately act decisively. I do. I am not haphazard in my approach to living, and am acutely aware of

life’s interconnectedness. It is. I am well trained, educated, and traveled. I dress properly. I drive defensively. I speak clearly. I grew up in the suburbs of New York City, went to college and graduate school in Massachusetts, taught in rural Mississippi and cosmopolitan Washington DC, lived in Alabama, Utah, and Suffolk England, planted a church and retreat center in Teton Valley, Wyoming, co-pastored a church in Austin Texas, and now serve the “Body of Christ” in a city on the Gulf Coast of Mexico called Corpus Christi! Flexibility, stability, and adaptability are ingrained survival skills I have come to hone and appreciate over the years. They serve me well. That being said, I never fail to remember that it is ultimately in Him that I live, move, and have my being.

How would you support and strengthen our community, balancing the needs of our Mutual Ministry congregations guided by regional Ministry Developers, with the needs of the Rector-led congregations

Basic fundamental congregational “needs” for survival, security, and esteem are common to church families whether mutually ministered guided by Ministry Developers or Rector led. I would help congregations discern, identify, and articulate their unique legitimate needs and teach them how to get them met. The spiritual principle of supply is modeled by Jesus. He has given us a model to follow and keeps his promise. This is good news. The principle rests on the premise that God alone meets our need (not greed) in the moment, and although the appearances and forms of supply may differ depending on circumstances, their Source remains eternally and inexhaustibly the same. This is true, and it is good news to any congregation. As an experienced teacher, I am prepared to equip leaders of all congregations to understand, access, and live out this principle of supply in daily life. This teaching is not found on the internet or in popular emerging church publications. It is rooted in a disciplined contemplative heart, open, prepared, and ready to receive. Once taught, leaders may pass on their practice and understanding to those in their care. Over time with fidelity, patience, and commitment intimacy with God deepens and congregations naturally become participants in their own prosperity. Any tendency towards competitiveness or envy ceases. As each congregation is strengthened and supported, it spontaneously strengthens and supports the greater whole.

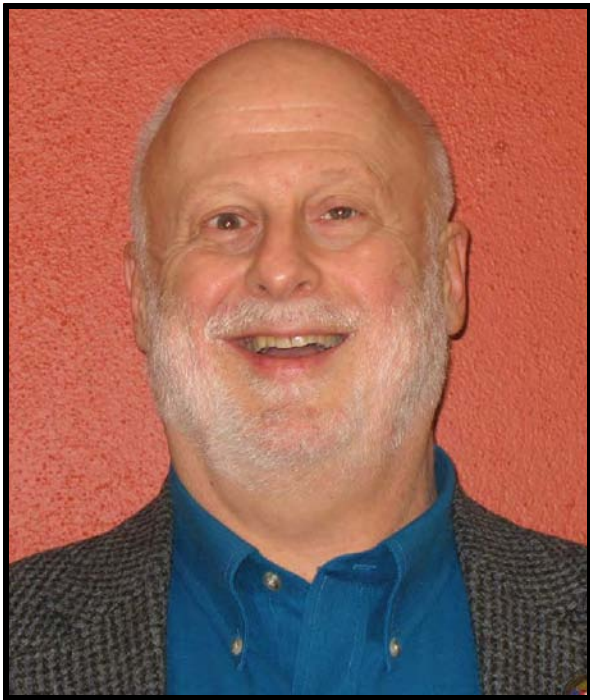
Our congregations have a rich history of Christian outreach. Tell us about your experience in Christian outreach.

Christian “Out” reach is correlative with Christian “In” reach. Resting in God is a basis for parish outreach, and the deeper the rest the more dynamic the ministry. My 40+ years of contemplative practice convince me that Jesus’ admonition to clean the “inside of the cup,” and then worry about the “outside of the cup,” is an effective guideline Christian outreach. Purified of hidden agendas, parishes are inspired to reach out boldly. They do. Folks know intuitively it is God who does the work, and God is glorified. Outreach under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit cooperates with human hands, hearts, and minds. Energized, resourced, and equipped parishes respond effectively to the legitimate needs of the wider community. It is a win/win situation. Intimacy with God seeks to express itself through unselfish service to the neighbor, and the disciple hears, “well done good and faithful servant.” I have experienced this phenomenon in every parish I have served. The Spirit possesses unlimited resources to lavish on those who would first seek the Kingdom of God and She does. As a priest with others in my care we have started retreat centers, written grants, designed seminary programs, organized “Theology on Tap for 20’s and 30’s,” ministered to homeless youth on the “drag” in Austin, helped paint churches after Katrina in Houston, sheltered the homeless, provided \$50 loans for entrepreneurs in Africa and “gone green!” I know the possible possibilities for outreach are endless and “anything is possible” ...with God’s help.

Our congregations want to grow. Tell us about your experience in growing congregations.

“Oaks from acorns grow,” and congregations, like trees, grow where they are planted. When I arrived at the doors of St. Francis (Diocese of Idaho) in Alta Wyoming many years ago, the Bishop said to me, “Sandy, I want you to grow this church whose outreach mission will be a retreat center. I will see you in six weeks, and I have a lot riding on this.” The spiritual and financial sustainability of these projects and me were one! Highly motivated I drank daily and taught others to drink from the spring of “living water” whose refreshment made our mutual goal attainable. The successful interdependence of these two ministries came to testify by word and example to the “Good news of God in Christ.” Through our fidelity to scripture, sacrament, and prayer, coupled with hard work, both parish and retreat center flourished under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Drawn, sustained, and nourished by Jesus, many came to Alta to rest, eat, drink, study, and pray. Jesus helped us, we helped others, and the bills got paid! As a result of ingenuity, good stewardship of resources, trust in God, and humility of spirit that acknowledged “of ourselves we do nothing,” the congregation grew mightily. Our desire to grow was connatural with God’s desire to “grow us.” He did. I am deeply drawn to the people and land of Wyoming. I know the landscape well, I love it, it formed me, it is in my bones, and calls me home.

THE VERY REV. CANON F. MICHAEL PERKO



Wyoming is a rural state, our residents are aging, much of our population is transient and we encompass a wide range of socioeconomic groups. How does your training and experience prepare you for our geography and demographics?

I believe that my experience prepares me well for leadership in the Diocese of Wyoming. My family has deep roots in Wyoming. My great-uncle began our family's presence in the state, "running sheep" in the Upper Hoback south of Jackson in the 1890s. My grandfather dug coal for the Union Pacific near Rock Springs, eventually dying of black lung. I still have an elderly aunt who lives there, as well as cousins in Pinedale. My parents owned a small ranch in Bondurant, and one of my first encounters with The Episcopal Church was at St. Hubert the Hunter. I have camped and hunted in Wyoming, as well as ridden Fall roundup and consulted for a local school district. I consider myself a son of Wyoming, and would

love to return and help lead the Church there.

My present ministry also prepares me for service in your diocese. I served the Diocese of the Rio Grande as Bishop Steenson's Canon to the Ordinary until his departure, and now, as Canon to the Ecclesiastical Authority during this interim season. Territorially, our diocese is the second largest in The Episcopal Church, and over half of our 57 congregations are widely dispersed missions. My ministry involves both central administration and visitation of, and assistance to, these congregations. Additionally, I serve as Dean of our Diocesan School for Ministry, which raises up locally-trained deacons and priests. Thus, I am intimately involved in the challenging task of developing leadership, especially for small semi-rural congregations.

How would you support and strengthen our community, balancing the needs of our Mutual Ministry congregations guided by regional Ministry Developers, with the needs of the Rector-led congregations

The bishop is pastor, cheerleader, and sounding board. S/he is first and foremost called to be one who shepherds, especially the lay and ordained pastors. At the same time, the bishop needs to be visibly present to the congregations, not to micro-manage but to encourage them. There is, however, a critical aspect to this role. The bishop needs to be a model of genuine holiness and wise discernment, helping individuals and groups to identify unique gifts and challenges, and encouraging them to grow more and more into the likeness of Christ.

I take it as a given that all Christians are called to ministry by virtue of their baptism. Thus, in one sense, every congregation is ideally a Mutual Ministry congregation. However, the form that this Mutual Ministry will take necessarily varies depending on the character of the congregation. A major focus needs to be the raising up and development of both ordained and lay leadership. For those smaller congregations which largely are lay-led, there is a need to provide the resources for ministerial formation, while serving

as a catalyst to bring folks together for common learning and support—ministry can be a lonely business, especially in rural dioceses! For the larger congregations with rectors, the challenge is to be supportive of both lay and ordained ministries, recognizing that having a rector doesn't cancel the call to ministry by all the baptized. Here, the challenge is to help people discern their ministerial calls, and to develop collaborative relationships among clergy and lay ministers.

Our congregations have a rich history of Christian outreach. Tell us about your experience in Christian outreach.

Prior to being called to New Mexico, I was directly involved in a variety of assistance programs to families in the Palestinian Territories under the auspices of various Church groups and UNWRA, as well as a food pantry in suburban Chicago. Necessarily, my current ministry as an administrator makes my outreach involvement somewhat indirect. Mainly, I am involved in the allocation of diocesan resources for outreach programs of a variety of kinds, both local and international.

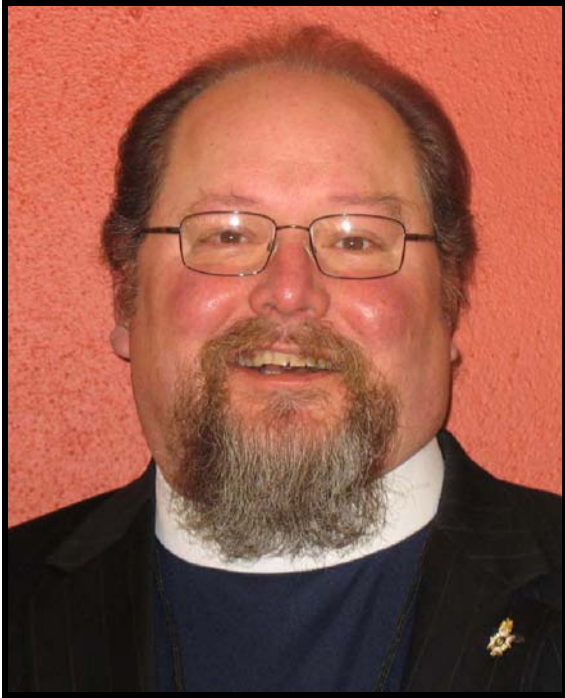
Currently, my main outreach involvement is in support of my wife Lisa, our family's "outreach specialist." A lawyer focusing on Child Advocacy, she continues to teach me about—and draw me into—a variety of forms of Christian outreach. She also directs several outreach activities at St. John's Cathedral. Especially, I have assisted her directly with two major projects. One is an "Angel Tree" project at Christmas, which provides food and children's gifts to families in our very active Food Pantry program. My work has involved assisting her in coordinating the logistics of the program, as well as buying gifts for children, wrapping them, and helping to deliver them to our Food Pantry families. The second, a program that she began with my encouragement and assistance, provides school backpacks to children of our Food Pantry families. This also involves coordination, purchase of backpacks and school supplies, and distribution of the filled packs to children. In its first year of operation, the "Back-A-Pack" program provided packs and grade-appropriate school supplies to 250 children.

Our congregations want to grow. Tell us about your experience in growing congregations.

My experience in congregational growth largely has been at the diocesan level. As Deployment Officer for the diocese, I have worked with congregations to help them ascertain their needs, identify their strengths and areas of challenge, and work collaboratively with the diocese to call clergy leaders who will help them grow. Necessarily, I have also been involved with congregations in one sort or another of crisis or distress, helping them to find a way forward. Both of the interimships I have held have been at the request of the bishop, and have been of this latter sort. In both instances, I have assisted the congregations in short-term stabilization and growth, and prepared them for longer-term interim leadership.

In these activities, as well as personal and professional involvement with congregations that are healthy and growing, I have observed that the essentials of Church growth appear fairly clear. Institutions, including Churches, that have a clear sense of who they are, who they want to be, and what their mission is do well: those that are more amorphous do not. In our diocese, one of the most successful congregations would be labeled "progressive," while another with comparable growth could be characterized "traditional." In both instances, the congregations have a sense of purpose, are rooted in Jesus, and are well-led by collaboratively-ministering laity and clergy. The role of a bishop in all this is to help congregations define themselves and then raise up leaders and develop programs of action out of this self-understanding.

THE REV. CANON CLARK M. SHERMAN



Wyoming is a rural state, our residents are aging, much of our population is transient and we encompass a wide range of socioeconomic groups. How does your training and experience prepare you for our geography and demographics?

During the past 26 years I have served 6 congregations in Colorado and Montana, both rural and urban, in the mountains and the foothills. These churches ranged in size from 12 to 1,200 and represented a broad demographic of people – all ages, all races, rich, poor, ranchers, bankers, teachers, students, business owners, full time, seasonal and vacationing communicants, and so on. I consider myself a westerner, fully versed and immersed in western culture and norms. As parish priest, diocesan staff and canon I have entered the lives of generational westerners, and engaged their hopes and fears, trials and joys. Ministry in Colorado and Montana demanded a great deal of driving, as churches are scattered over great

expanses of land. Not only have I traveled hundreds of thousands of miles in ministry, I actually enjoy it. I do not accept distance as an excuse for not getting the job done. I have developed and carried out ministry with the varied groups listed above. Some of my greatest joys have come from youth ministry, campus ministry, ministry to veterans and ministry to senior citizens in nursing homes. I have long been a proponent of multi-generational ministry and formation, and have experienced success in its deployment. The Rocky Mountain West is a magnificent thing – rich in culture, tradition and people. The Episcopal Church is wonderfully equipped to address the region’s spiritual needs, harness its energy, maximize its treasures, and grow the Body of Christ that is the Diocese of Wyoming.

How would you support and strengthen our community, balancing the needs of our Mutual Ministry congregations guided by regional Ministry Developers, with the needs of the Rector-led congregations?

By embracing the catechetical notion that we are ALL ministers in the Church; the laity, bishops, priests and deacons, I have been a champion of mutual ministry for years and believe it must be modeled by the diocese as a whole. I will enact this model of a “shared episcopacy”, where Episcopal ministry is shared throughout the diocesan structure. I have experienced great success with this concept at the parish level – a “shared rectorship”, where authority and ministry is shared by clergy, staff, vestry, committees, task forces and lay ministers. I envision a shared episcopacy where the diocesan staff, standing committee, diocesan council, commission on ministry, individual church’s leadership, diocesan committees and ministries are empowered in ways that allow the bishop to serve as chief shepherd and guardian of the Faith. I believe the diocese exists to serve the churches. The bishop may be the face of the diocese, but the PEOPLE are the diocese and must be empowered in ministry. Mutual trust is vital. It is of the utmost importance that the bishop be in touch with the people and to support his priests. Regional offices might be considered, allowing the bishop to maximize his travel agendas and be available to people. Yearly Episcopal visits are possible and important. The creation of a council of deans would not only empower a deanery structure, but would greatly assist the bishop in dealing with issues facing the diocese – such as ways to support and balance the needs of all congregations.

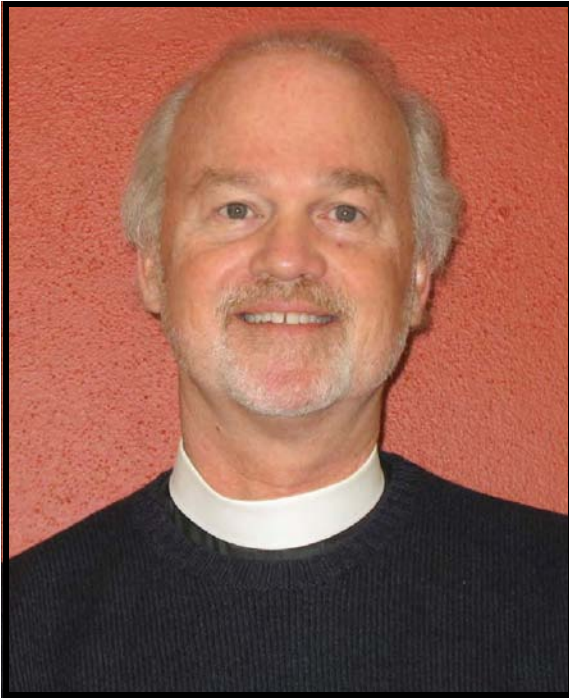
Our congregations have a rich history of Christian outreach. Tell us about your experience in Christian outreach.

The priority of Christian outreach is as old as the Church itself. As the book of James says, “faith without works is dead”. For me, outreach is a two-sided coin – social action and evangelism. These two are not mutually exclusive. I have a rich history in the former through mutual ministry in the churches I have served. These ministries are quite varied – jail ministry, ministry to the homeless and hungry, a thrift store for lower income families, Habitat for Humanity, a clearing house for community needs, to name a few. By name, Gallatin Valley Family Promise, Love, INC and HIS SOUP are all ministries co-founded by my current parish. These ministries primarily fulfill the needs of the homeless and lower income families. Evangelism is a facet in many of my ministries. I served as campus chaplain at Colorado State University early in my vocational career and now serve as chaplain at Montana State University. Campus ministry is a powerful evangelistic tool. My parish brought Godly Play to the Diocese of Montana and it has been integral to growth in parish membership, as young families are attracted to the parish through this program. My wife Jamie is a licensed Godly Play trainer and offers training workshops throughout the region, including churches in Wyoming. I embrace community involvement as a way to honor both social action and evangelism. This being the case, I have always been active in supporting community organizations, serving on various boards and volunteering my services.

Our congregations want to grow. Tell us about your experience in growing congregations.

As an adult convert to the Episcopal Church, I understand a person’s search for relevance in the Anglican Tradition and Faith. I understand what attracts people to the Episcopal Church and how best to promote that in a parish. During my vocational career I have presided over significant size transitions. I have taken a church from chapel-sized to family-sized, another from family-size to pastoral-sized, and yet another from pastoral-sized to program-sized. Technology is a key to growth in the 21st century. My current parish as developed a number of ministry websites and uses Facebook, video conferencing and other internet tools to maximize communication. Traditional norms are also important. Mutual ministry is also a key to church growth. The laity must be empowered to reach out in creative ways to a populace that is searching and hungry for spiritual growth and welfare. Clergy and laity must be active in the life of the community – on the streets, in the shops, at community events. Most people come to church because someone invited them. The Church must be inviting and visible. This includes the Bishop. As regional canon for the diocese I have traveled all over the state working with small churches and their growth issues, through visioning, leadership development and conflict management. Above all, I have found that when a faith community and its leadership are willing to roll up their sleeves and tap into the power of the Holy Spirit, growth is a natural result.

THE REV. JOHN SHERIDAN SMYLIE



Wyoming is a rural state, or residents are aging, much of our population is transient and we encompass a wide range of social economic groups. How does your training and experience prepare you for our geography and demographics?

In 2005 I was given the opportunity to be the convention speaker for the diocese of Wyoming. Following the convention, the Bishop made me available to congregations around the diocese. In that role of leading conferences, retreats, educational events, musical offerings, pastoral and spiritual support to congregations and individuals, I was also given the opportunity to explore much of Wyoming. Traveling around the diocese of Wyoming in 2005 and then again in 2006 to offer more programs throughout the diocese, I fell in love with the state. I see the geography as a joy not a problem. There is a side of me that is contemplative and the long and quiet roads feed my spirit.

Since moving to Wyoming in January of 2007 to serve as Rector of St. Mark's in Casper, I have had the opportunity to travel throughout even more of the state in my role of serving on the foundation of the diocese and as president of the board of directors for Thomas Apostle Center.

Since being ordained in 1982 I have had the opportunity to serve in rural, suburban and urban environments. Having a deaf son has exposed me to another culture within my own family. Today at St. Mark's in Casper we are constantly meeting a transient population who come to our food closet. We have redesigned this Ministry to meet the ever-changing needs of our current challenging economic environment. The bottom line principle is to show respect to each one who comes in the door asking for help.

How would you support and strengthen our community, balancing the needs of our mutual Ministry congregations guided by regional Ministry developers, with the needs of the Rector -- led congregations?

When I first came to Wyoming I learned of tensions between Rector led congregations and the Mutual Ministry model. At first I didn't understand the tensions but after living here I believe I have a better handle on these concerns today. Our current bishop was called to strengthen smaller congregations and to develop a model of Ministry in Wyoming that would allow vulnerable congregations to be sustained. This has been done, though the current financial constraints within the diocese will need to be addressed regarding the care of our shared ministry congregations. I believe the current structure spreads our Ministry developers very thin and may leave them vulnerable to burn out. Rector-led congregations, while being important to the strength of the diocese and to the diocesan budget, have not received as much attention as Mutual Ministry congregations over the past decade. I believe this concern can begin to be addressed by re-envisioning us as "one diocese", stressing our commonalities rather than our differences. Since coming to Wyoming, I have sought to serve as a bridge between Rector-led congregations and mutual ministry congregations. We have come to a new day and the movement towards the development of apostolic teams is an example of bridge building between the Bishop, Rectors, Ministry developers and local congregations.

In the years ahead I hope to explore how Rector led congregations may participate in and learn from the shared ministry model. I would seek to provide opportunities for all leaders to gather using regional centers like the Cathedral, Wyoming Wilderness Camp, Thomas Apostle Center and the Diocesan office as places where we could do this relational work while also making time to have some fun together.

Our congregations have a rich history of Christian outreach. Tell us about your experience in outreach.

The first church I ever served as Rector was in Hope, New Jersey. There were budgetary constraints in the public schools and the music and art program was dropped. Though we were a small church we took on the challenge of providing an alternative music and art program for the children of the community. Members of the congregation, talented in fine arts and in music, shared their gifts to serve the children. This action led the congregation into a relationship with all segments of that rural community where all the children were welcome regardless of their economic status.

In Hamburg, New York we developed a nursing home program that won an outreach award. In the mid-1990s, I was an advocate for the Episcopal Conference of the Deaf at General Convention and was able to influence the Program Budget and Finance Committee to revise their budget to include Ministry among the deaf on a national level.

While at the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist, white supremacists were gaining national attention and the leadership of the Cathedral and the Jewish Temple organized a March Against Hatred beginning at the Temple and ending at the Cathedral. Over 1800 people joined our march whereas the white supremacists only had about 20 in theirs.

St. Mark's is known for its outreach. In the midst of these difficult economic times we have maintained a tithe from our budget to support outreach opportunities. We have an active food ministry that has increased significantly over the last nine months. St. Mark's supports the millennium development goals with an offering from our budget and with special projects. In the Diocese of Wyoming I have been a key voice in the development of the Mustard Seed Mission for our congregations.

Our congregations want to grow. Tell us about your experience in growing congregations.

Throughout the Episcopal Church there is a crisis of growth. The "Report to the 76th General Convention" (59-81) presents a statistical analysis that dramatically shows these concerns. Though nearly all the congregations I have served in my 26 years have shown moderate growth, growth can be a tricky business. One key is to develop a strong youth program. Everywhere I have served as Rector and as an assistant, we have done this. Most recently there was no junior high or senior high youth program at St. Mark's. We now have an average attendance of 15 to 25 young people coming every Wednesday from September through May.

In Hamburg, we experimented with an alternative worship service held on Saturday evenings. A band opened with 20 to 30 minutes of praise music with words projected on a screen. The celebrant would wear casual clothes with a stole. A relaxed atmosphere was created and prayers for healing were available at the end of the service. This effort increased our attendance.

Another effective way for inviting healthy growth is by developing small group ministries designed to meet needs found in the community. I believe that the keys for growth in our Episcopal Churches are centered on worship, fellowship and youth. The Wind and Wings program started in 2005 is worth much effort in the years ahead. The concept behind it, of ministering to all the children in our state, is a worthy concept that will have long term positive repercussions. In the years ahead I hope our church will recognize and create new possibilities for worship experiences that are more accessible and more connected to the realities of those who walk through our doors, by tapping into the creative talents of those within our communities.