

A ROLE MODEL FOR THE APOSTOLIC WORK OF A BISHOP FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ... AND BEYOND

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Of all the ministries exercised within our beloved Church, I believe the Order of Bishop, for those who are faithfully and fully engaged in the office, to be one of the most taxing of all vocational calls. The work, like any, can be done poorly, or wonderfully — and I have experienced both and a lot in between.

In the “Preface to the Ordination Rites,” the *Book of Common Prayer* states that the role of a bishop is to “carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church.” There is more, of course, but these three tasks, when done well, are crucial in making the machinations of the Episcopal Church function in a healthy way. What might that look like?

Among the many Bishops I have known, and under whom I have served, Bishop Andy Doyle, the 9th Bishop of the Diocese of Texas, stands out as a role model for living into these three tasks. I offer a small caveat first. I retired nearly a year ago, so I have no cause to try and score points with Bishop Doyle, but I certainly commend his leadership as a role model for those who are at present a Bishop, or who may be called to that ministry in the future. What is the shape of his ministry in

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these three areas? Let us take a look.

The Task of Leading. It was our Lord who said, “Many are called, few are chosen,” (*Matthew 22:14*). Only once did I enter an election process for Bishop, but after making my way through the initial steps, I withdrew, because I knew I was not called to that ministry. A Bishop should not seek the office, unless there is an authentic call to it.

One of the things that struck me as (then) Canon for the Diocese of Texas, Andy Doyle made his way through the election process for Bishop of Texas back in 2008, was that he openly said, “I am called to be your Bishop.” In all honesty, at first, it was a bit off-putting. But the more I listened, and the more I learned about why he felt called, I came to believe how important that call was. More to the point, he did not say he was called to be a Bishop in “any Diocese,” but



*At my institution as
4th Rector of St Martin’s—
Bishop Don Wimberly
presiding (who is also a great
Bishop) but Andy standing by
as Canon to the Ordinary*

that he felt specifically called to be the Bishop of Texas. He did not have what we clerics sometimes call “purple fever.”

Years ago a friend of mine was serving as the organist for a consecration service for his new Bishop. After the Consecration, my friend in an attempt to offer a compliment

said, “That purple looks good on you.” The newly consecrated Bishop said, “It should, it has been in my drawer for five years. Whether it was said in jest or not, I cannot say, but it might explain why he had run for Bishop not in one Diocese, but many.

Bishop Doyle is a “child” of the Diocese of Texas. He grew up in the Diocese, attended the Diocesan Camp (Allen) as a child and teenager. As priest and Canon, he had come to know the clergy and leaders of the Diocese and he had observed the developing challenges and opportunities he might face as Bishop. He clearly embodied Frederick Buechner’s description of vocation, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.” He was not called to any Diocese at any time, but to the Diocese of Texas at a particular time, (cf. *Esther 4:14*).

Once elected and consecrated, Bishop Doyle has been able to bring that collective experience with him to invigorate and inspire those under his authority, which of course is a powerful tool in leading others.

Another Bishop under whom I was blessed to serve, was the late Right Reverend Bill Stough, the 8th Bishop of the Diocese of Alabama. Bishop Stough used to talk all the time about the difference between ordained persons who are “maintenance minded,” and “mission minded.” He believed those driven by maintaining the *status quo*, remained stuck and that a ministry shaped by merely maintaining was an ill-conceived contagion that choked the life out of the Church. On the other hand, ordained leaders who were “mission-minded” were comfortable in the world of ecclesiastical chess — always looking ahead be-

yond the present to the future. That absolutely describes the ministry of Bishop Doyle. Virtually every public address — whether at confirmation services, clergy conferences, or Diocesan Council — is soaked by Bishop Doyle's vision-casting. Sometimes the vision is concrete with a clear architecture of building blocks, and other times it is a public test run to see if others would catch that vision.

Of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as the old saying goes, and the proof certainly confirms the mission. Since his Consecration as Diocesan Bishop in 2009, 17 new congregations have been formed, thousands have been baptized and confirmed, and scores of Christians have been ordained to the Diaconate and Priesthood. Bishop Doyle has set before the Diocese the ambitious goal of adding more Churches and upwards of 50 missional com-

munities in the remaining years of his Episcopate. He does all this on top of authoring a number of thought-provoking and insightful books, leading over 550 canonically resident clergy in the Diocese, over 70,000 baptized members, and serving in various roles of leadership for the global Anglican Community. I might add, he is a collector of vinyl albums, paints on the side, and has learned to play the banjo. This is a model for effective leadership.

The Task of Supervising. Bishop Doyle has not had to struggle to gain the trust of those he serves, but he has earned it, one step at a time, by being open, vulnerable, and transparent. Over the years, I have known some Bishops who felt more inclined to maintain the perception of the office, over and above a full on encounter with the person beneath the miter. This is not my experience with Bishop Doyle. If

he is concerned about something — you know it. If he has a measure of justifiable anger — you know it. He does not play to his audience, telling them only what they wish to hear, but speaks openly about his own concerns and dreams.

But beyond that honesty and transparency, there is a vulnerability I have rarely seen in a Bishop. Once, at a gathering of the Diocesan clergy, the Bishop openly shared that for a season, he was plagued with anxiety and stress on the heels of the horrific bonfire tragedy on the campus of Texas A&M that took the lives of 12 people and injured many more. He openly told the clergy how he sought the spiritual direction of other ordained clergy, along with therapeutic and psychiatric care to deal with his own personal challenges. In displaying this kind of vulnerability, he opened the door for his own clergy to face their own personal challenges and

seek the help they needed to assuage their own burdens.

I have known clergy over the years, who spent untold hours pushing back against the leadership of their bishops, maybe with cause, but I felt no need for that in my relationship with Bishop Doyle. I accepted his supervision, because he allowed me to ask questions, raise challenges, and even to differ from time to time.

In 15 years, it will be no surprise that Bishop Doyle and I did not always agree. On occasion, we would get tangled up. The *only letters of apology I have ever received from a Bishop* are from Bishop Doyle — when he thought perhaps he had done or said something to damage our relationship, he had no hesitancy in apologizing. And prompted by his model, I learned the value of returning that favor to my Bishop when necessary and to others I was called to

serve. But what does it say about a man or woman who apologizes, when they hold the mantle of power? It says he or she cares.

I never question that Bishop Doyle cares about those he is called to serve. Many was the time that the Bishop would write a note (not email, nor text, but a hand-written letter), on the anniversary of my ordination, or on my birthday. When I faced illness or death in my family, the Bishop would reach out. When I was facing a major crossroads in ministry, a health issue, or just a tough season in ministry, the Bishop would call or set up an appointment. We have laughed together, wept together, and prayed together more times than I can count.

He is “present” which carries the most weight of all in the work of supervision. He was there on the day I was instituted as a Rector and he was

there on my last day in that same office — and he was there time and time again in all the years in between. This is not top-down supervision; it is eye to eye. Andy Doyle models a supervision that births my allegiance, loyalty, and trust not because I have promised to offer it in my own ordination, but because I know he is in the trenches with me through thick and thin. And even after retirement, I still reach out to him for advice, counsel, and spiritual direction. This is what faithful supervision looks like.

The Task of Uniting. Bishop Doyle has never been one to strike out on his own without deep and serious collaboration with the clergy under his leadership. During the most divisive years over issues around same-sex marriage, rather than simply taking one path or another, he called together nearly one hundred clergy and lay people of var-

ious positions on these matters to meet, pray, discuss, and disagree over an entire year. The work produced the effective “Texas Unity in Mission Plan,” which allowed a diversity of opinions and practices among the churches in the Diocese, such that clergy and parishes ready to embrace same-sex marriage could do so, and those who believed and held to the traditional view of marriage could do the same — both positions receiving the Bishop’s support. The end result? Council gatherings were no longer dominated by endless rank and file resolutions and statements around marriage and sexuality, clergy and parishes could live true to their own conscience and calling, and the Diocese did not split apart.

I watched the Bishop practice this pattern again and again. When the US was in the heat of racial division after the

merciless killing of Houstonian George Floyd, the Bishop called together clergy and laity to hear everyone’s views on the best and most practical ways to push against the prevailing tides of racial division and unrest in effective ways.



Andy, as Bishop, attended a farewell concert on my last day at St. Martin’s; and here he is signing his approval for my retirement. So, in essence, he was there at the beginning and end and many days in between.

As the Church entered the valley of the shadow of Covid — the Bishop regularly met with various clergy in the Diocese to hear their own ways

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of dealing with the pandemic. At first, he had hard and fast rules across the board, but as he listened to the myriad of experiences across the Diocese, he changed his view, assuring (aka “trusting”) the clergy in each parish that they were best suited to determine what did and did not work in their particular setting — there was no one size fits all approach to dealing with the pandemic. As long as we were observing all major health guidelines, we had our Bishop’s support.

This kind of collaborative leadership consistently set the stage for clergy, even those with vastly different positions and theological perspectives, to grow with a sense of mutual respect and authentic trust. This is what happens when a Bishop leads the way to authentic unity.

I should add, Jesus Christ is at the center of Bishop Doyle’s

ministry. Yes, there were and are issues galore living within the Church, and in the larger public square. When necessary, the Bishop addressed them, but they have never been the driving force in his ministry. The proclamation of The Good News has been and continues to be his aim and it is through that lens first and foremost, that Bishop Doyle effectively carries his apostolic vocation.

Leading, supervising, and uniting — this is the work to which our Bishops present and future are called. We need our Bishops, but we also need them to live into these tasks faithfully and fully. When they do, with the prayers and support of those under their care, we are all the better for it... the Church is better for it... and the hope and the promises of the Gospel will continue to spread in effective, life-giving, and vibrant ways.