
My Loves and My Calls

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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Dear Friends: This week, the Diocese of Atlanta will announce that I am among several nominees for election as the next Bishop of Atlanta. I am truly honored to be among some excellent priests in that assembly. The nomination is an honor for me, but I know that my nomination might present questions in the church as to why in the world I am doing this!

Let me explain, then, something of my own prayer and discernment during the last several months, as the Nominating Committee has been discussing this possibility with me. The prospect of running for bishop is a daunting one; as you know, I consented to nomination last year in Washington, D.C., and I was not elected. The emotional and spiritual twists of our Church's episcopal election processes are grueling and very public. But this process is the process we have. Furthermore, I am thriving and enjoying my vocation as Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip, a position which I consider one of the finest in the Church. I love it here, and this parish community blesses me.

However, the prospect of being bishop for the Diocese of Atlanta has also excited me. When I ran for bishop last year, I found myself actually having lots of ideas and vision for what a bishop can be in The Episcopal Church. Moreover, I love, not just Atlanta, but the entire Diocese of Atlanta. I grew up in Coweta County. I spent some formative years in Episcopal youth groups from Rome to Gainesville. My discernment about this position has been sincere and serious.

One of my own spiritual practices during periods of discernment is to "contemplate my loves." As I face a major decision, I ask: Who, and what, do I love? I pray, that, as I consider my loves, God's direction becomes clearer for the calls in my life. Where God is calling me has something to do with my loves.

So, first of all, I truly love my family—my wife, of course, who has been companion and friend with me for over 35 years now. Together, we have our own children, their wonderful spouses, and their friends; and we have wider family, throughout Georgia and in Maryland. Both my parents still live on the land where I grew up, outside Newnan. Those are dear commitments for us. I am blessed with several close circles of friends, too; we have broken a lot of bread together (Will Campbell once said that a friend is someone you've "spilled a lot of salt with.").

I also truly love the parish of the Cathedral of St. Philip. We, too, have spilled a lot of salt together (and bread and wine!). I love Atlanta, one of the great cities of our country. But I also love small towns, which have more varieties of people than outsiders realize. I love the outdoors, where I grew up; I love being outside, under the stars, in the woods, walking in fields.

I also love outsiders. I pay attention to people who seem outside the system, perhaps forgotten or ignored. My ministry as a priest has been drawn to the outsiders and to the marginalized. I love to write. I love to teach. I love to preach. I love to experience God in new places, and in new people.

Finally, I actually love The Episcopal Church. This Church has blessed me. Of course, the Church has not always been good to me, and I have often disagreed with The Episcopal Church. But I love this Church, and I believe we have something powerful and graceful to offer the wider world.

So, with the consideration of these loves, I believe that God is calling me to imagine being Bishop of Atlanta" at least to be part of the nomination and election process. The church needs me to offer my gifts and ministry" and my loves" to a wider system; and I need to offer them, too. I know I might not be elected. That particular call is not clear yet, but this first part is.

The motto of my old school, Berkeley Divinity School at Yale, is "in illa quae ultra sunt" "Into The Regions Beyond." That phrase meant both our mission and the place where we meet God. I pray God will meet me, too, as I accept an invitation to explore the "regions beyond." Please pray with me" for ourselves, for the Diocese of Atlanta, and for the world. Thank you.

Sam Candler signature



The Very Reverend Sam Candler

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