

***Episcopal Election - Required Responses Part One***  
***Commander the Venerable Jennifer Gosse-Vingerhoeds***

1. Describe your understanding of the Bishop Ordinary's ministry.

Most importantly, the Bishop Ordinary is the pastor for our chaplains. They do what every good chaplain does in their unit – they are present to their people. They listen, they reach out, they celebrate with their people in good times, and struggle and mourn with them in bad times, and they intervene to help when necessary. They are in person with their people at every possibility and connecting with them virtually in between visits.

The Bishop is also the bridge between the Church and its chaplains, and that bridge goes in two directions. Chaplains are on loan from the Church to do its work in a secular environment. In seminary we are trained to work inside our own faith group, but the daily work of military chaplaincy is outside of that vital support system. Chaplains can feel isolated and chaplains can also isolate themselves. The Bishop can be a bridge across that spiritual loneliness, grounding ACC and ELCIC chaplains in their own faith. They can provide opportunities for meaningful connection to the spiritual resources of our tradition so that chaplains are nourished in their spiritual lives and enabled to carry out their work in the CAF.

The bridge also leads in the other direction, such that the Bishop Ordinary carries the stories of the chaplains back to their faith family. The Bishop takes every opportunity to tell the Church the good news of chaplains' work in the CAF. In addition to reporting on chaplains' ministry in the House of Bishops, the Bishop Ordinary can bring broader awareness of chaplaincy to the wider Church by visiting parishes across the country during their travels. This would be particularly important where there are Reserve chaplain positions. If those positions are filled, the Bishop supports the chaplains there and if they are vacant the Bishop may recognize an opportunity to recruit a new chaplain.

2. Describe your Christian Faith.

As a young person, my faith was shaped primarily by what I understood of the doctrine and ethics, and practiced in the liturgy, of the Anglican Church I attended. I appreciated the faiths and beliefs of others, but I had very definite ideas of what was, and was not, Christian in terms of belief and action. In my mind, Christians believed in the doctrines derived from Scripture and the traditional creeds and lived their lives accordingly. With age and life experience, I began to see my youthful assumptions as somewhat naive.

Now, as in my youth, I still believe doctrines that are derived from Scripture and tradition, I base my actions on ethical principles gleaned from those sources, and I prefer to worship using Anglican forms of common prayer, but I understand that there is more to God than any doctrine or liturgy can express. Scripture and liturgy feed my soul, as they always have, but the God who has led me through the storms of my life cannot be contained or defined solely by them.

Today I am less interested in defining correct belief and prefer to simply be in the presence of the Mystery whose essence is Love and who calls human beings into relationship with God's-self and one another. I meet God in Church and in Scripture, but also in creation, and in relationships with loved ones and strangers. I feel an affinity to St. Francis and his understanding of how all of

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creation responds to, and expresses, the glory of God. I resonate with Celtic Christian spirituality for its intermingling of trinitarian Christian faith with an understanding that the heartbeat of the incarnate God is also revealed in the very pulse of the earth and all its creatures. I no longer believe that other Christians, or other Anglicans, must share my exact beliefs, rather there is room in the Church for all who seek to delve into the mysteries of God by sharing in community with other believers.

3. What would be most important for you when supporting Chaplains stationed at bases across Canada and deployed internationally in areas of conflict?

For me, the most important thing in supporting chaplains, whether they are serving in Canada or abroad, in garrison or deployed on any mission anywhere, is to let them know that they are not alone, to assure them that they are held in prayer, and that their service and sacrifice are recognized, respected and honoured by their Church and country.

I will never forget when I was deployed for six and a half months at sea, on a day when home was half a world away, the mission was rough, and no one in my family or even my chaplain team knew where I was or what I was doing, out of the blue I received an email from my Bishop Ordinary. He told me he was praying for me and for the people with whom I was serving. I remember sitting in my cabin on the ship, grateful that my cabinmates were both on watch at the time, because I didn't want them to see their chaplain in tears. That day my Bishop was my chaplain.

Chaplaincy can be lonely when you are the only chaplain on a ship bobbing around in the ocean for 32 days at a time. Chaplaincy can hurt your soul, wherever you are, when tragedy strikes, some of your troops fall, and you are called upon to lead with wisdom, strength and encouragement, even as you wonder how you can possibly live up to all the demands for your attention and support.

I never want any chaplain to feel hurt and alone at moments like those. It would be my duty and privilege as Bishop Ordinary to reach out to each of my chaplains regularly, to check in with them, to give them an opportunity to be heard and supported themselves, and to let them know they are appreciated and held in constant prayer.

4. How would you connect and support AMO laity across Canada?

We have made a lot of progress over the last couple of years identifying those who are both Anglican/Lutheran and part of the military family, and who are interested in being part of the AMO. There have been spiritual development sessions offered online by a former chaplain gifted in teaching the faith, and the laity have been invited to virtual meetings with the Bishop. The Bishop should continue to support those opportunities, but there is still more to do.

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It was recently brought to my attention that we have not been as active in identifying ACC/ELCIC CAF members in some of the more remote parts of the country. There are many faithful Anglicans, for example, serving as Canadian Rangers across the north. The AMO has not yet tapped into that part of the CAF to encourage participation in the AMO. The Bishop Ordinary can use their connections in both the chaplaincy and the Church to reach out to invite participation from Rangers, thus supporting them in their faith and in their military work.

During base visits, the Bishop Ordinary usually meets with the chaplains, sometimes sharing a Eucharist and/or a meal with them. Those meetings could be extended to include the AMO laity as well.

Where there is regular Sunday worship in a chapel community, the Bishop can attend and offer to participate, but even where Sunday worship has ceased, the Bishop could work with the chaplain team to advertise a simple weekday “Lunch with the Bishop Ordinary”, paid for by hospitality funds from the Bishop’s budget. The full DND community could be invited, whether they be Anglican, Lutheran or otherwise. This could be an opportunity to spread awareness of the AMO and the Bishop Ordinary among people who otherwise might never hear of them. Only God knows what seeds might be planted during such an encounter.

5. How would your ecumenical, interfaith and intercultural experiences inform your ministry as Bishop Ordinary?

My ecumenical, interfaith, and intercultural experiences have shaped in me a ministry grounded in listening, humility, and a deep respect for the many ways faith is lived and expressed. They have taught me that faithful leadership is not about asserting a single way of being Christian, but about fostering relationships in which diverse perspectives are honoured and held together in Christ.

I have long been interested in what others believe and how those beliefs shape their lives. This interest guided my academic studies in world religions and continued through seminary, where I sought opportunities to experience Anglicanism in a variety of contexts. Through the Anglican Church of Canada’s Theological Student Internship Program, I spent a summer in Uganda, serving in two parishes and gaining a deeper appreciation for the breadth of our Communion and the cultural contexts in which it is expressed.

Following seminary, I was invited to serve as a Catechist on the coast of Labrador, among several First Nations and Inuit communities. What began as a three-month placement became ten years of ministry. During that time, I came to better understand the distinct histories, cultures, and spiritual perspectives of people within my own province, which are often very different from those I had known growing up. Later, as Archdeacon of Labrador, I participated in gatherings of the Council of the North, where I witnessed how Indigenous identity and Christian faith are lived together across diverse northern contexts.

These experiences have convinced me that there is no single way to be human, Christian, or Anglican. As Bishop Ordinary, I would draw on this understanding by nurturing relationships

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across ecumenical, interfaith, and intercultural boundaries, approaching others with curiosity, openness, and respect. I would seek to create space for genuine encounters, where differences are engaged thoughtfully and received as gifts, and where trust is built through ongoing dialogue and shared life.

6. What is important about the Bishop Ordinary's role as the Anglican Church of Canada representative on the Interfaith Committee on Canadian Military Chaplaincy?

The Bishop Ordinary represents the ACC and ELCIC on the ICCMC and it, in turn represents all faith and spiritual traditions in Canada to the Minister of National Defence on all aspects of military chaplaincy. The ICCMC ensures that the members of the CAF have qualified, credentialed, well-grounded, and spiritually mature chaplains to serve them. The members of the ICCMC have a tremendously important, and sometimes difficult, task as they receive and consider every chaplain application. It is a work that requires an open, but also discerning, spirit because they are essential to the process of attracting and recruiting qualified, motivated individuals as future chaplains.

Chaplains look to the ICCMC for leadership and guidance on matters of faith and spirituality both in their own traditions and in their work in the CAF. The ICCMC offers advice to the leadership of the RCChS and is the continuity between chaplains and their spiritual/faith groups. Anglicanism is often called the *Via Media*, the middle way, and the Bishop Ordinary can perform that role even within the ICCMC itself, acting as a centering agent between traditions that are very diverse, coming from all parts of the spectrum of Canadian society.

Finally, as one of only two members of the ICCMC for whom this work is their main employment, the Bishop Ordinary is someone who can be available when other ICCMC members are tending their main duties. As Bishop Ordinary, I would make myself available to any chaplain who needed a listening ear, not just those from within the ACC or ELCIC. Just as a chaplain serves any CAF member without regard to their faith or any other consideration, the Bishop Ordinary can serve in that same manner to any chaplain who seeks out their spiritual counsel.