

Application for Bishop for the Diocese of TN

Full Name

Colin Moore Ambrose

Preferred Name (if different)

Colin

Current Ecclesial Role / Title:

Vice Rector and Chief of Staff

Diocese / Jurisdiction:

Tennessee

Current Parish, Cathedral, or Ministry Setting:

St. George's Episcopal Church, Nashville, TN

Please provide a link to a recorded service or homily you have delivered:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaHI_9PRv4o&t=1598s

Please attach a copy of your CV:

- See link on profile page

Date Ordained to Diaconate

10/22/2008

Diocese

Quincy

Date Ordained to Priesthood

05/16/2009

Diocese

Springfield

Theological education (degrees, institutions)

Masters of Divinity, Nashotah House, 2009

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Additional education or certifications relevant to episcopal ministry

Clergy Clinic in Family Emotional Process, Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, 2011-2012

Please summarize your vocational journey, highlighting roles that have most shaped your leadership and pastoral identity.

The Diocese of Tennessee has been home to my entire ordained ministry. This diocese has formed me, and I have given myself to it in return. After serving two congregations over seventeen years, including leading both through seasons of transition, I look to this diocese's future with great hope and great expectation.

At St. Paul's, I served as Associate Rector, followed by Interim Rector. Those years were formative. I tended to the breadth of congregational life, developed family and youth ministries, and helped volunteers understand how their service connected to something larger than themselves. While there, I led the Vision 150 process at the parish's 125th anniversary. This was a congregation-wide discernment effort that produced a renewed sense of mission, a long-range campus plan, and a set of concrete initiatives that put that vision into motion. Over a decade at St. Paul's, I learned how to equip leaders, build trust, and help a community find its way forward together.

St. George's has been a different kind of call: a parish that is large, complex, and was marked by five years of plateaued growth when I arrived. As Priest-in-Charge, I navigated the parish through COVID-19 and renewed our sense of mission and ministry structure. I maintained trust and deepened engagement through that season and as a result we set the parish on a new trajectory of growth. St. George's has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, a reminder that difficulty, faithfully navigated, can expand a community's capacity rather than diminish it. As Vice Rector and Chief of Staff, I oversee thirty-nine staff members, including thirteen priests, and remain closely involved in every area of the church's life in close partnership with the Rector.

At the diocesan level, I served on Bishop and Council, currently serve as President of the Disciplinary Review Board, and am a member of the Beloved Community Commission for Racial Reconciliation. Beyond the diocese, I am committed to the communities I serve. In Murfreesboro, I co-founded an ecumenical council of clergy, bringing congregations together across denominational lines to explore how churches and the local hospital ministry might better support one another. This kind of work, Christians from different traditions gathered around a shared mission, is something I care about. I currently serve on the board of United Way of Greater Nashville, working alongside civic and nonprofit leaders to promote the common good.

The Diocese of Tennessee is home. I know its strengths and I know its struggles. I have been shaped by both. Trisha and I have been blessed to raise our three children here - Clara, Henry, and Adel - and this diocese has formed them too. I offer myself to it, fully and with hope.

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Describe your sense of call to the episcopate. How do you understand the bishop's vocation as chief pastor of the Diocese of Tennessee?

I recently spent an afternoon with the rector of a small congregation in our diocese. His congregation is growing, which is a gift, and a source of pressure. He lacks the resources to hire staff. He is struggling to get his vestry engaged. The day-to-day demands of his role leave little time to think beyond next Sunday. Together, we worked through it: the organizational structure, the vestry health, the leadership development, and also the quieter question of whether he had a rule of prayer that could hold him through difficulty and replenish what parish ministry steadily depletes. We came up with a plan. He left energized. So did I.

That conversation is what I think about when I consider this calling. I think about a diocese where every priest feels known by their bishop, where every congregation is equipped and celebrated, all of us sharing what God is doing and finding ourselves astonished together.

I want to serve as the next Bishop of Tennessee because this diocese is ready for what comes next. Bishop Bauerschmidt has given us a strong foundation: a diocese that is stable, solvent, and at peace. Now the work is building on it. I have spent seventeen years walking alongside local leaders, learning to hear what God is doing in their context. That is what this diocese needs: a bishop who can sit with a rector in Cookeville or Clarksville or Sewanee and help that congregation realize what God has prepared for them. St. Paul writes that God can do more than we can ask or imagine. That applies to this diocese, right now.

That work, helping every congregation in this diocese realize what God has prepared for them, begins with a bishop who is present. The Ordinal charges a bishop to "take counsel with the clergy." This is the work I delight in. Central to that presence is a commitment to attentiveness: helping the diocese pay attention to what God is doing in our midst. I begin every staff meeting by asking us to name what God is doing outside our personal area of ministry. It is a simple and transformative practice that forces us to look around. When a community learns to notice and give thanks for what the Spirit is doing among them, something shifts. Gratitude grows. Energy builds. Gifts that were present yet unseen get named, and once named, are released. Seeing what God is doing is where everything begins.

I think of that rector driving home and wonder what he told his family that evening. I know he left with a plan, believing in the gifts of that parish, and hopeful about what comes next. That is the work I love: showing up, thinking strategically together, discerning where God is moving, and then watching a congregation come alive to what it was made for. There is nothing quite like it. A growing congregation blesses the world around it. Multiplied across forty-three congregations, that is a diocese transformed.

How do you nurture your own spiritual life and how would it shape your public ministry as bishop? How do you practice wellness, spiritually, emotionally, and physically?

The year I was ordained, my mother gave me an icon. It was an image of Christ the Great High Priest - the same icon used to mark the Year for Priests declared by Pope Benedict XVI - with a small image of Saint John Vianney at its border. Vianney, the Curé of Ars, spent his priesthood in a small French village, pouring himself out for his parishioners through prayer, preaching, and endless hours in the confessional. He taught that faithfulness to God is expressed through faithfulness to the life God has given you: the vocation, the duties, and above all, the particular people placed in your care. That icon hangs in my office, and that counsel has become one of the organizing principles of my life: be faithful to the relationships God has given you.

The relationships God has given me are my relationship with God, with my family, with the Church, with friends, and with myself - including the care of the body God has entrusted to me. Faithfulness in each of those relationships requires discipline, and discipline requires a rule of life that holds in hard seasons as well as easy ones.

My prayer life is built around a daily rhythm. Each morning, I spend an hour in prayer, beginning with the Daily Office and followed by a period of centering prayer. In the afternoon, I return to silence for a second period of centering prayer. Each evening, Trisha and I pray together before bed - a simple practice that has become one of the anchors of our life together. I also meet with a spiritual director and confessor.

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My experience from years of this practice is that prayer does something that study and effort alone cannot. It forms you. It is not something we do for God, it is participation in what God is already doing. That participation is, I believe, where my capacity for discernment comes from: the ability to recognize where God is already moving, and to see gifts in others before they see them in themselves.

Physically, I am disciplined. I walk, play tennis, strength train, and practice flexibility. These habits are part of my faithfulness to the body God has given me.

As bishop, all of this will shape my public ministry in one essential way. A diocese tends to reflect the interior life of its bishop. If the bishop is anxious, the diocese absorbs that anxiety. If the bishop is rooted, that rootedness radiates outward: into clergy, into congregations, into the common life we share. The Diocese of Tennessee needs a bishop rooted deeply enough in prayer to hold steady, listen well, and discern patiently, and whose steadiness flows outward as a gift to the whole diocese.

What does faithfulness, vitality, and witness to the gospel look like for congregations of different sizes, settings, and resources?

I have spent seventeen years watching people encounter the Church for the first time. What draws them in and keeps them is never the programs alone. It is the moment they realize they have a role. God himself has invited them into ministry with him. They arrive as guests and discover they are participants, people whose particular gifts are essential to what God is doing here. People are hungry for that invitation. The Church's extraordinary privilege is to extend it.

Rowan Williams writes that a well-functioning Christian community is one in which everyone works steadily to release the gifts of others. To see what someone carries and call it forth is more than good leadership. It is an act of love. The Church is a community in which every person has something irreplaceable to give, gifts not of their own making, given by the Spirit for the building up of the whole. Belonging, in this vision, is about being part of the team, united in a purpose larger than any of us. It begins in worship, where Word and Sacrament form us into a people capable of carrying that life into the world.

What this looks like varies by context. In smaller congregations, health is measured by faithfulness. A small congregation with a committed praying core and a clear sense of its call is a congregation whose gifts, faithfully tended, radiate outward into the community around it. These congregations often carry more than they realize: deep roots, long relationships, and a knowledge of their community. The bishop's work is to help them see what they have, celebrate it, and trust what God is doing through them.

In mid-sized congregations, the gifts are present, and the energy is real. These churches often feel the tension between intimacy and growth, between doing everything themselves and learning to share the load. The work is to help them build the clarity and structure that surfaces gifts, as they raise up lay leaders to carry real responsibility for the mission.

In larger congregations, the size must serve the mission rather than obscure it. Gifts are present in abundance, and they need to be named and released intentionally. Vitality comes when clear pathways exist for participation, when every person is known and invited.

There is nothing more beautiful than a faithful church. It is a place of belonging, of affirmation - God's affirmation of us, and ours of one another. It is a place of purpose and transformation. We encounter the living God and we are not the same. In a hard and broken world, a vital congregation does not just survive. It shines. It orders what is chaotic, loves what is forgotten, and sends its people out as carriers of the grace they have received. I became a priest because I fell in love with that. I will spend my episcopate helping every congregation in this diocese live into this reality.

Describe how you exercise authority and leadership in complex systems. How do you make decisions and communicate them broadly and with transparency?

Leadership in complex systems requires two things held in tension: the humility to listen deeply before deciding, and the courage to decide. A bishop who only consults has abdicated leadership. A bishop who only decides will find himself leading alone. The work is holding both, and for a bishop, that work begins in prayer.

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The profile reveals what the diocese needs. Seventy-four percent of respondents want moderate to large change, while the diocesan culture has historically stayed close to established ways of doing things. Lay leaders report high energy and low satisfaction. They are ready to move and are looking for clear direction. That gap between energy and clarity is exactly where I can help.

The clearest illustration I can offer of how I lead complex systems is from the pandemic. As Priest-in-Charge of St. George's, the questions were constant and often deeply pastoral: how to gather for worship, how to administer the sacraments, how to provide pastoral care for the sick. I formed a medical advisory team, worked through every major decision with vestry and staff, and then decided. Once I decided, I communicated broadly and consistently, explaining the reasoning and connecting it to our shared mission. When someone disagreed, I reached for the phone. Most people do not need to get their way. They need to be heard and to understand how a decision was reached. We navigated that season without destructive conflict, and the parish emerged with trust intact and on a new trajectory of growth.

The pandemic also clarified something I have always believed: authority is most powerful when it is entrusted to others. I made the decisions that required my authority, while giving leaders across the parish full ownership of their own ministry decisions. I checked in regularly to help. And when they decided, I backed them. The work of leadership is not making every decision. It is building relationships of trust deep enough that good decisions get made by the right people, people who know you will stand behind them.

A diocese is a more complex system than a parish, with more congregations, more voices, and more distance between the bishop and the daily life of the people. The work is the same: listen well, decide clearly, explain the why, and trust the people God has placed closest to the need.

How would you support clergy across theological differences, vocational stress, and personal challenges?

The mission of the Church is "to restore all people to unity with God and one another in Christ (BCP p. 855)." This begins with the clergy. If the clergy of a diocese are isolated from one another or competing, congregations will suffer. Unity among clergy is not a precondition for the mission. It is the mission, already visible or already absent.

Sustaining clergy begins with presence: a text of gratitude, checking in on a pastoral care concern, and asking the questions that matter - not just how the parish is doing, but how they are doing, and whether they have a rule of prayer that can hold them through hard seasons. That last question matters more than any other. Prayer is what makes the work of ministry a participation in what God is already doing rather than something we do for God. I will tend to the spiritual life of every priest I serve.

Sustaining clergy is also a communal work. The clergy of this diocese have something real. They know one another, trust one another, and show up for one another. I want to build on this. In my own ministry, I do not burn out from too much work. I burn out when I lose the why, when the demands of the role crowd out any sense of what it is all for, and I stop looking around. What brings me back, every time, is the encouragement of brothers and sisters in ministry, hearing what God is doing in their lives, in their congregations. That has not just sustained me. It has energized me. It has sent me back to my own prayer with renewed expectation. That is what I want for every priest in this diocese.

Across theological differences, sustaining that community becomes harder. Clergy on different sides of contested questions share a common fear: that a bishop who disagrees with them will not truly be for them, that their ministry will be tolerated rather than supported. This is especially true around questions of marriage and human sexuality. I bring personal theological convictions to the office. However, the office itself is larger than any one person. I act as a steward of the whole Church, and I will take responsibility for its teaching in this diocese, providing pastoral oversight for all marriages. We all want a bishop who agrees with us. That is natural and understandable. But what the diocese needs is something harder to find - a bishop who is genuinely committed to every priest and every congregation, whatever position they hold. Not a bishop who is on your side of the question, but a bishop who is on your side.

What is at stake is larger than clergy morale. A clergy community that holds together across genuine difference, that prays and grieves and celebrates together despite disagreement, is a witness first to our congregations and then to a world that has largely

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forgotten how. We cannot ask our people to do what we are unwilling to model ourselves.

Describe your approach to conflict, reconciliation, and when necessary, discipline. How would you help the diocese remain rooted in the Gospel?

The goal of Christian community is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of reconciliation. Conflict, honestly engaged, can deepen trust and clarify mission. What destroys a community is not disagreement. It is the absence of relationships strong enough to hold people together through it.

That is why the most important work happens before conflict arises. A diocese whose clergy know and trust one another - where the bishop has invested in those relationships over time - has the foundation to navigate difficulty without fracturing. You cannot build that foundation in the middle of a crisis. It has to be laid in advance: through prayer, presence, consistency, and genuine care.

During my time at St. Paul's in Murfreesboro, the city became the center of a bitter public conflict over the construction of a new mosque. The fear was real, shaped by the memory of September 11 and a broader anxiety about cultural change. Our congregation was divided. Rather than avoiding the tension, we engaged it directly and did something simple. We organized a progressive dinner with the Muslim community, eating together in one another's homes in small groups. That shared table achieved what arguments could not. It is still my clearest example of how presence and relationship can transform fear into understanding.

There are moments when the situation demands more than a relationship, and a bishop must act with both clarity and care. When discipline is required, the instincts are the same as good pastoral care: the courage to name what is true and the commitment to do it with love. The bishop holds both, always in the service of restoration rather than punishment.

I have served as President of the Diocesan Disciplinary Review Board for two-and-a-half years, working to make that process more effective, fair, and pastorally sensitive. The National Church's structured approach ensures consistency and protects everyone involved. I believe in the process and am committed to carrying it out with timeliness and care.

Keeping a diocese rooted in the Gospel means keeping it rooted in who it is: ministers of reconciliation, entrusted with an identity larger than any disagreement. That is the vision Paul offers in 2 Corinthians 5, and it is the vision I want this diocese to embody.

Discuss your experience and theology of diocesan administration, fundraising, financial stewardship, and staff leadership.

Early in our marriage, Trisha and I sat at our kitchen table with a pledge card from St. Timothy's Episcopal Church in Raleigh. The number on that card was \$7,000, ten percent of our income. We were newly married, hoping to start a family, trying to save, and \$7,000 felt like a lot to give away. We had been taught that this practice mattered. So, we signed it. What followed was not financial hardship. It was formation. I had grown up believing the world was defined by scarcity: gather, save, protect. Giving sacrificially opened us to a different vision: that everything is gift, that God is good, and that generosity is participation in that goodness. What began with a pledge card became, over time, a growing offering of ourselves.

That conviction shapes how I think about administration, fundraising, and stewardship. Jesus' parable of the talents suggests that faithful stewardship is not about protecting what we have been given. It is about putting it to work. Good administration is not the necessary burden that makes real ministry possible. It is itself a form of ministry: creating the conditions in which gifts are recognized, people are engaged, and the Church becomes more fully itself.

The diocese exists for the congregation. Its role is to see what each community needs, resource it generously, equip its leaders well, and trust them to do the work. A diocese that operates from that conviction spends less energy on itself and more on the people it exists to serve. In a diocese as diverse as ours, from some of the fastest-growing counties in the country to some of the most economically challenged, that means resourcing congregations where they are and planting new ones where God is calling us forward.

