



**DIOCESE of  
CHRIST our HOPE**

## **Statement from The Rev. Ben Sharpe**

Finalist for the office of Bishop Coadjutor

Diocese of Christ our Hope

### **What has formed you as a person, as a priest?**

Above all, with Charles Simeon, I am at my very heart of hearts “a Bible Christian.” In fact, all that has influenced me, whether persons, experiences, or theological ideas, throughout my forty-three years of actively following Jesus Christ has had to pass through the fine sieve of the Word of God. In that sense I am *homo unius libri*, a man of one Book. God’s Word is the great formational engine of my discipleship and my ministry. As I encounter other people and movements that share this love for the Scriptures I am inspired and enriched by their interaction with the text. That interaction with and application of Scripture in the whole church through the centuries is the riverbed through which the Great Tradition flows. Thus, the study of Christian history in general affects my ministry in a very practical way on a daily basis. My practice of pastoral care, evangelism, and catechesis finds its roots in how Christians have faithfully followed Jesus over the course of two millennia.

Considering the more immediate influences in my life as a follower of Jesus and as a minister in God’s church, I cannot overstate the guidance and formation I have received, and continue to receive, from my father, Benny Sharpe. My father has practiced law in North Carolina now for well over 50 years. The wisdom that he directly taught and modeled formed me as a man. He is a true gentleman and has a quiet, steady faith in Jesus Christ. When I told him I was going into the ministry he offered me sage advice that I still remember and apply to this day. It was my father’s guidance that perhaps made the deepest impression on me in how I imagined and prioritized my role as a pastor in the early years of my ministry.

Leonard Fox and Charlie Cobb were the two laymen who mentored me following my conversion at age 16. They taught me how to study the Bible, how to pray, how to share my faith with others, and the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Essentially, they laid the foundation for my life as a disciple. In my undergraduate years Campus Crusade for Christ further equipped me as a disciple and an evangelist. In the same period of time, the ministry of the Most Revd. Robert Duncan at the Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill introduced me to the Anglican way of following Jesus. My first real job after college was as a District Scout Executive. The formal and *in situ* training I received in that role equipped me to lead a large, not-for-profit organization. I learned how to analyze the dynamics of a community, recruit members and volunteers, raise funds on a large scale, and train leaders. All of these functions were completely transferable to pastoral ministry.

My wife, Lisa, has a profound, ongoing impact on how I process walking with Jesus on a daily basis. My true character and the genuineness of my Christian commitment are revealed in how I interact with those closest to me. The crucible of these dearest relationships burns off my false self-evaluations and my self-deception to reveal the true progress (or lack of progress!) of God's work of sanctification in my life. Moreover, my wife's counsel and wisdom continue to be used by God to help me think through the application of pastoral care to the presenting needs of the people I serve. Most of all, just knowing I have her deep love and support in my ministry is critical for me to be able to serve sacrificially in the church and the world. Her own willingness to sacrifice in order for us to be on mission together grants me flexibility and the space to fulfill God's call on my life.

Throughout almost all of my 34 years of pastoral ministry, the Revd. Greg Jenks has been my best friend, my confessor, and my accountability partner. His ongoing friendship is a continuing means of God's grace to encourage and form me as a priest and a disciple of Jesus. Finally, time does not permit me to speak to how every church I have served and planted over the years has

formed me. Yet, God has sovereignly and intricately woven all of these people and experiences together in my life to form me as his servant.

### **What is your vision for our diocese? What are the challenges and opportunities for our diocese?**

My vision for the diocese: Preach the pure Word of God. Duly minister the Sacraments. Make disciples.

That may sound simplistic, but faithfulness is not complicated. It's just difficult. It's so difficult we can only be faithful through God's grace in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, we preach, minister the sacraments, and make disciples in a particular context in our diocese. That being the case, it goes without saying that we need to continue to press into the gifts, graces, and vocation God has bestowed on us as the Diocese of Christ Our Hope. I cannot imagine our diocese departing from its emphasis on church planting, developing next-generation leaders, and working collaboratively with other dioceses for the sake of the Kingdom. Granting the ongoing vitality of our stated [mission and shaping values as a diocese](#), I think some of the challenges and opportunities we face can be grouped under these headings:

Reaching Underserved Communities

Resilience and Evangelism

Fidelity and Unity in the Truth

Health and Maturity

**Reaching Underserved Communities:** I have a particular passion for seeing underserved communities as potential locations for new church plants. Planting churches in college towns and influential metropolitan areas is a *great good*. But planting in small towns and rural areas is equally good. Small towns and rural areas have suffered the loss of employment and institutions critical to community life. As a result drug abuse, suicide, family disintegration, and

other social ills have become defining realities in some of these areas. In many cases the “old line” Protestant churches in these communities have been hollowed out due to revisionist theology and a lack of evangelistic zeal. The void left by these churches means that there is tremendous potential for the kind of gospel-centered, sacramental churches we plant to reach the unchurched and de-churched in these areas. The small towns and rural areas of our diocese are a gaping wound that cries out for the healing balm of the gospel and I am convinced that, by the Spirit of God, we can become a force for transformation and restoration in these forgotten places.

Similarly, we have a huge opportunity to actively seek to plant churches in minority communities. At the present time great work is being done in supporting church plants in immigrant communities in our diocese. Most of these churches are situated in the East African immigrant community. However, the global character of Anglicanism means that we have a head start in reaching into other immigrant and refugee populations that have settled in our diocese. Personally, I have a particular desire to see refugees and immigrants from the Middle East touched by our diocese. Finally, we have the opportunity to increase the ethnic diversity of our diocese by recruiting and investing in emerging leaders from minority communities.

**Evangelism and Resilience:** Sharing the gospel and bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ looks very different in 2021 than it did in 1995. For that matter, effectively sharing the Good News varies tremendously in the different regional contexts of our diocese. If we genuinely want to be about fulfilling the Great Commission, we have to have a diocese-wide conversation on how we do evangelism in this moment in which God has sovereignly placed us. Our cultural moment is no more antagonistic to the proclamation of the gospel than Palestine or the Roman world were in the first three centuries of the church. And yet, the marginalized believers of that era bore great fruit for the Kingdom. We can be confident that God wants to do no less through us than through them.

I am convinced that we need to prepare our clergy and congregations to be missional in a culture that no longer sees Christianity as a social good. I believe we need to prioritize equipping churches to be *resilient* and *fruitful* in the face of cultural opposition. Among other things, resilience means that we need to remind our churches that all followers of Jesus must be prepared to suffer reproach for the name of Christ (Matthew 5:11-12; John 15:18-16:4; 1 Peter 4:12-19). However, resilience doesn't just mean endurance in the face of opposition; it means that we need to guard our hearts from bitterness and not be among those whose love grows cold because lawlessness abounds (cf. Matthew 24:12).

**Fidelity and Unity in Truth.** Geographical size, coupled with regional diversity, are distinct challenges for maintaining unity in our diocese. Mission and ministry in New England look very different than in North Carolina. These dynamics by themselves mean that we constantly need to be building relationships between the various regions of our expansive diocese. Organizational structure can assist in this, but a commitment to connect beyond our local churches and local areas is essential to maintaining genuine community and connection in the Diocese of Christ Our Hope.

A greater concern is that unity always be grounded in a commitment to the truth revealed in God's Word, expressed in the historic creeds and confessions of the church, and lived out in the doctrinal statements of our Diocese. Genuine Christian unity does not come at the expense of biblical truth. Throughout the centuries the church has always experienced internal and external pressure to compromise the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. The ACNA in general and our diocese in particular are not immune from being tempted to surrender orthodox faith and practice in order to accommodate the spirit of the age. I am convinced that one of Anglicanism's strengths is its "generous orthodoxy." However, this does not mean granting latitude to teachings and practices that strike at the heart of the apostolic faith.

**Health and Maturity:** We have reached a season in the life of our diocese in which we need to pay particular attention to ensuring that established churches are positioned for long-term health and growth.

This means attending first of all to the spiritual, emotional, relational, physical, and financial health of our clergy and their families. Healthy clergy tend to plant and shepherd healthy congregations.

We have to simultaneously support existing churches while continuing to plant new congregations. My own study and pastoral experience cause me to believe that intentional, systematic catechesis of every member of the church is a key component of congregational health. We need to remember that growing as a diocese includes growing *deep* in our discipleship.

### **Given who you are, what difference would you make in our diocese?**

Twenty-six of my thirty-four years of pastoral ministry have been spent planting churches. God has prospered the church I serve through my pastoral care, teaching and preaching, and oversight. As a result of this flourishing, we have been blessed to be directly involved in planting three additional churches since 2008. Since 2004 I have had a particular call to form emerging pastors and church planters.

In this season of my ministry God has shaped me to be a “papa.” In part, this means that I believe the Holy Spirit has gifted me with wisdom, steadiness, faithfulness, and a deep affection for God’s church and her people.

So, in one sense, I have the spiritual gift of being *ordinary* – an ordinary, steady, Bible-teaching pastor. Yet I rejoice in this and believe that this is indeed a great gift. I am reminded that it is through the *ordinary* that God makes us extraordinary. Through the *ordinary* means of grace, *ordinary* water, *ordinary* Bible study, and in *ordinary* bread and wine, we behold the glory of

the Lord and “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Lisa and I love expressing the hospitality of the Kingdom of God as we welcome congregants, colleagues, and strangers into our home. I have been and continue to be willing, by God’s grace, to endure hardship for the sake of the truth of the gospel. While I care deeply about our province, my heart and energy are devoted to caring for this diocese, its parishes, clergy, and people.

I care passionately about providing for and protecting the flock of God. God has gifted and called me to live and lead from a posture of radical fidelity to Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures and the breaking of bread. I glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf., Gal. 6:19). By God’s grace I do not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God (cf., Acts 20:27). I have a passion for renewing the emphasis on Christian catechesis (i.e., systematic training in discipleship) that marked the early church and the Reformation.

Finally, I think my commitment to biblical orthodoxy, wise and consistent leadership, and singular devotion to the wellbeing of our diocese are the strengths I bring to the table.