BEING CALLED, BEING GAY

• • •

Discernment for Ministry in the Episcopal Church

Gregory L. Millikin

FOREWORD BY MARY D. GLASSPOOL

CHURCH PUBLISHING INCORPORATED

CONTENTS

1

Awakening

"Here I am." (Exod. 3:4)

On Mount Sinai, Moses, the eighty-year-old shepherd toiling with his flock, finds a burning bush. Moses approaches the bush, and the voice of God calls out to get his attention: "Moses! Moses!" Moses responds with the Hebrew word *hineni*, or in English, "Here I am."

So begins the journey of Moses, a call narrative in and of itself that indeed began many years before when the infant child was placed in the basket down the Nile. But now at this ripe age in Exodus 3, Moses is drawn into dialogue with God about his vocation. And Moses, in all his Mosesness, will struggle, debate, question, and wrestle with this calling. But he will do so with a great degree of honesty—with himself, and with the LORD God.

• • •

Honesty might be the most important word in this book about sexuality and call. It is the word that marks the intersection between the two topics, the intersection I am keen to inspect in these pages. In fact, in all honesty, the journey of discovery with respect to one's sexual identity

runs parallel to that same person's call to serve God in any capacity. They are both journeys of discovery, and they are both marked by a great need to be honest with oneself.

To begin, it may be helpful to examine these two parallel tracks one by one. Let us start with the honesty needed in the realm of sexuality. The general assumption about human sexuality is that we, female and male humans, usually start figuring out our sexuality at puberty (typically ten to thirteen for girls, twelve to fifteen for boys). That may in fact be true; but the reality is that many children, encouraged by their increasingly culture-savvy parents, start to explore their gender and sexual identities at incredibly young ages. It is now believed that children begin to be aware of gender identification somewhere between two-and-a-half and four years old.[1] I know of at least two families in my life in the last ten years who have processed the unexpected awakening that their toddler-aged son is choosing to wear dresses. In an age of *Frozen*, there are some little boys who feel they can best express themselves (at an age where expressiveness is pretty difficult) by dressing like Princess Elsa.

Will these two boys grow up to be gay or bisexual men? Are they on a path toward transitioning to women? The answer is of course joyously unclear. This is their reality *now*. Anything could happen, but the remarkable realization is that the parents are not panicking or showing any sign of distress. This might not have been the case as recently as fifteen years ago perhaps. For my parents' generation, the boys may have expected punishment if they did not submit to wearing the heteronormative shirt and shorts. But now, the boys, guided by the wisdom of their parents, are being honest with themselves: their wants, their desires, their inclinations. This is the path children take when sexual attraction or activity is not even a glint in their eye; a child's behavior or proclivity gives us a clue

into the complex sexual identity still gestating inside each of them.

Alan Downs in his book *The Velvet Rage* describes the often painful awareness in the gay child of being different than the others. He uses the second-person narration to draw the reader into a place of familiarity and solidarity:

> But perhaps starting at the ages of four to six, your parents realized that you were different. They didn't know exactly how or why, but you were definitely not quite like the other children they had known. It may have had little or no influence on their love for you, but they may have treated you in a different manner than your siblings, or differently than your friends' parents treated them. You too began to understand that you were different. The understanding was only dim at first. But as those early years progressed into adolescence, you became increasingly aware that you weren't like other boys—maybe not even like your parents.[2]

At a certain point, probably puberty, things kick into high gear for children. Identity flowers into attraction and impulse. It is unlikely that a sixteen-year-old male or female, for example, would *not* have some sort of semblance of an idea of where his or her attraction lies—even if it is, well, complicated. And for the LGBT+ population, by about age sixteen, no doubt, these boys and girls have experienced an all-too-chilling feeling and raw emotion: *I am not like the others.* Downs continues:

> Along with the growing knowledge that we were different was an equally expanding fear that our "different-ness" would cause us to lose the love and affection of our parents. This terror of being abandoned, alone, and unable to survive forced us to find a way—*any way*—to retain our parents' love. We couldn't change ourselves, but we could change the way we acted. We could hide our differences,

> ingratiate ourselves to our mothers, and distance ourselves from our fathers whom we somehow knew would destroy us if they discovered our true nature.
>
> And we didn't hide our true selves just from our parents. As best we could, we hid the truth from everyone, especially from other children. Children, probably more than any other people, are keenly aware of differences from one another, and often torment one another they perceive as different. . . . It was this early abuse at the hands of our peers, coupled with the fear of rejection by our parents, that ingrained in us one very strident lesson: *There was something about us that was disgusting, aberrant, and essentially unlovable*.[3]

For a queer child, the most powerful of bittersweet feelings is that sense that he or she is not like the other children in some way. This exposes that great human wound in the LGBT+ community that, unfortunately, separates them from heterosexuals in modern society. For on the one end of the spectrum, the consequences may be minor at best. Maybe the young person has to be more discreet in conversations with friends. Maybe the teen has to endure gay-related epithets from his or her friends for a period of time. Maybe the dreaded high school locker room will just be a stress pot for those few teen years.

Chris Glaser, an out Presbyterian who describes his path in ministry in *Uncommon Calling,* paints it this way:

> We grow up feeling bad about our sexual urges and our bodies because this early silence speaks louder than the subsequent words of assurance. A child assumes that what can't be talked about must be bad. Expression of sexual feelings among children and adolescents is usually met with parental anger or anxiety, because of parental protectionism and because of adults' own negative feelings about sexuality. All those children then grow up feeling

> bad about their sexuality and their bodies and become adults with similar attitudes.[4]

This is just the positive upbringing. Because, on the other end of the spectrum, the situation can be downright dire. The child may be ostracized by his or her family; some may be abused, neglected, or kicked out of their homes; and most tragically, some, such as young transgender women, are killed at alarming rates in hate crimes.[5] At the very least, it would be impossible to find an LGBT+ person who at one point in his or her life did *not* experience some kind of feeling or emotion of being "different" that resulted in any one or more of these scenarios.

The average LGBT+ young person has had to do some extra growing up. Most have had to address their sexuality in a public way, such as with inquisitive family members or friends. They have had to move from a place of closure to disclosure, the most culturally familiar being the practice of "coming out" from the proverbial closet. But a coming out process (no matter how stressful, dramatic, emotional, joyous, or any adjective in between) has to necessarily be preceded by a coming out to oneself. It is that penetrating, soul-searching realization that can happen very early, that startles a person not yet fully formed as a human being into a major reality check: my life is not going to follow the path of my friends and family. And at some point, perhaps after years of living with that notion inside their head, the queer person comes out to herself or himself. A light switches from "straight" to "not-straight," let's say.

• • •

I knew something was up from about nine years old. Let us just say that puberty started early, and as my hormones signaled a sexual awakening like every other human being

on the planet, my veins were decidedly filled with "non-straight" blood. By about age twelve, I knew my attraction to others was clearly not bound by gender. Therefore, I knew I was not straight. I knew I was not in the majority around me; I was not like the others. But it was later—far later—before honesty set in.

Like most young persons struggling with their sexuality, I learned to bottle it up. Downs explains, mixing tenses and person grammatically:

> We decided whatever it was—at the time we still may not have known what it was—must be hidden completely from view. Although we are older now, we are still driven by those insatiable, infantile drives for love and acceptance. In order to survive, we learned to become something that we thought would be more acceptable to our parents, teachers, and playmates.
>
> We made ourselves more acceptable to others in a variety of ways. Perhaps you learned that you could win approval by becoming more sensitive than the other boys. Maybe you learned that you could win approval by displaying a creativity that the other boys refused to show, or you learned to win approval by excelling at everything you did.[6]

In 2001, I went on a beach retreat in college with a bunch of friends, about fifteen altogether, a mixture of men and women. We stayed in a rental house together on Marathon Island near Key West, Florida. At some point on that trip, for whatever reason, the "light switch" I mentioned flipped over finally—some twelve years after I first felt *different*.

What happened was fairly innocuous. I had to share a bed with three of my male friends in this coed house rental. We approached this with democratic aplomb in this overcapacity vacation home: one of us takes the floor, the other three take the bed, and we all rotate position over

the seven days. On day four, it was my turn to lay in the middle of the bed between two male friends. There, with flesh upon flesh innocently and platonically, I lay still like I was in a coffin, staring at the ceiling. I was terrified to touch either man by mistake or proximity error, for fear of arousal—emotional or otherwise. And yet, in this terror, in which I did not sleep, but only panicked, I felt another pervasive mood wash over me: *maybe I want that to happen*. The next day, as we all laid out on the beach, swam in the Gulf of Mexico waters, and chugged our margaritas, I removed myself from the crowd. I floated in the ocean on my back, head facing the beach several hundred feet ashore. Watching my friends chat and laugh, I floated and floated. The confusion of emotions from the night before was overwhelming. Was I resisting something primal about myself? Beyond that, how was I to decipher what was lust, and what was real emotion?

And then, on those gentle waves, as I drifted out to sea seemingly forever, I came to the conclusion that was, up to that point, the most honest thing I could conclude about myself: I was not straight. *Not straight*. So what does that mean? Gay? For a kid from the suburbs of Richmond, that was the only possibility, and it was also a dirty word. The effeminate boys in middle school were teased and called "faggot," I can distinctly remember. Even as far as into college, my roommates and I played video games and used the epithet in disgust to one another if we were to meet an unfair ending in *Goldeneye* or *Super Mario Kart*. I am certain I participated in that bullying and improper behavior. The realization in the great irony that I would be one of those "gay boys" was overwhelming; would I be bullied now too? Would the jocks suss me out? Would I continue to "pass" for straight?[7] Over the next several weeks and months, I sat with this information swirling in my head. The term "bisexual" became something to wrestle with, even though

at the time it signaled some shadow assumptions, which I would later come to learn with some remorse. In reality, for much of the world, bisexuality is incredibly misunderstood and misrepresented. For many people, gay as well as straight, bisexuality is code for promiscuity, indecisiveness, inability to commit, and a halfway-house to just plain gay. More on this in the next section. But at the time, "bisexual" seemed the most logical description, even if I would come to regret using it to describe myself openly that summer of 2001. The heart of the matter was this: I was *not* straight. A new chapter in my life focused on honesty promptly began that summer.

• • •

Sexual identity really came into focus scientifically in the last seventy years. Without question, the pioneer in queer studies was Alfred Kinsey, an entomologist at Indiana University who in the 1940s switched gears to study human copulation. Sexual psychology was essentially born as Kinsey and his team unearthed a hornet's nest in human anatomy and physiology. In his seminal work, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948), he worked like a taxonomist on human sexual behavior; one of his breakthroughs was about homosexuality. Kinsey noted that an amazing percentage of males in his studies had engaged in homosexual experiences at some point in their lives, and still others had unrequited attraction for the same sex. For some, it was in addition to their sexual desire toward women. Sexuality was clearly much more fluid than society had shaped it to be. This led him to the creation of the "Kinsey scale." The Kinsey scale was further explored in his subsequent companion book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953).

The Kinsey scale works on a spectrum, from zero (0) to six (6), that measures human sexual attraction. Some-

one who is a "0" is exclusively heterosexual; a man only desires sexual intimacy with a woman, for example. Someone who is a "6" is exclusively homosexual, entirely uninterested in sexual relations with the opposite sex. Granted, without the construction of the Kinsey scale, we might assume that a majority of society is either a 0 or a 6, with a growing number of people perhaps being a "3"—someone who enjoys an attraction to men and women with absolute equality (a 50-50 bisexual). The reality is that Kinsey's scale hypothesizes along a logic that most humans in society fall *between* 0 and 6. More people may be a 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 than they would be a 0 or 6. It was simple math and logic to Alfred Kinsey. There are four bisexual-like options in the scale versus the three "cut-and-dry" options of gay, straight, and 50-50 bisexual.

Furthermore, a person may move along the spectrum at various points in their life, Kinsey asserted. A woman could go all the way to adulthood as a 0 or even a 1 or a 2, and then discover in her early forties that she now identifies as a 4 or a 5. This movement along the spectrum was essential to Kinsey's work. Though there are other studies and further science on the fluidity of sexual identity and attraction, I still prefer Kinsey's scale for its iconic simplicity. The malleability of sexuality may also shed light on our spiritual interior.

That leads me to that term again: discernment. *Discernment* is a major word with respect to Christian life. To discern is to make clear what is unclear, to separate out the parts or the elements so that clarity is achieved (as the Latin *dis- cern-* means "to separate from"). There is a general type of discernment, the kind that is intrinsic and in the heart, known only to the self and to God—indeed, it is the one I will illustrate next. And there is the formal kind, the kind that is a buzzword for a communal reality—a committee of peers, first and foremost. The step toward

ordained ministry in the Episcopal Church traditionally begins with the formation of a discernment committee at the parish level. More on this in chapter three.

The other key term is *call,* as in the act of God speaking to an individual in order to start a conversation or to implore that person into some kind of service. It is rooted in Hebrew Scriptures, just as God talked to Moses and called him into action. Call and discernment go hand in hand: one is heard and the other is practiced. When a call is heard, the internal discernment begins, and it is followed by the external discernment, at least as far as the Church is concerned. It becomes a kind of vetting process.

The ideal phrase is *sense of call.* A "sense of call" is completely different from "my call." One refers to a hunch or feeling, wrapped in uncertainty. The other is naively certain. One is humble and deferential. The other is self-serving and prideful. Call is perfectly encapsulated in this iconic phrase from the original manual of discernment, *Listening Hearts*: "In responding to God's call, we discover ourselves."[8]

This speaks to the kind of integrity that must be a part of one's journey into discernment. It is a journey of self-discovery, much like the coming out process itself. And call comes from within, yes, but it is primarily a call from God to do something for God's purpose. I resist saying "God's plan," but for some people that brings great comfort. If the plan is to grow the kingdom of heaven on earth, to reorient our post-Eden broken world to a place of wholeness, then, sure, sign me up for that plan.[9]

Indeed, as *Listening Hearts* describes, "We are to become fully the people God created us to be."[10] The reality is that our sense of call is only limited by our grasp of what God desires with respect to our gifts or talents. The God of Genesis 2, who takes soil in two hands and forms human, *yitzar* in Hebrew, does this day after day.

God takes our talents and our gifts, our abilities and our limitations, and repurposes them for the work of the kingdom of heaven. By far the largest and most difficult step of this phase of the journey is to identify a sense of purpose, a sense of calling to something God-oriented. The next step is to articulate this to the community, and begin testing this sense of call.

• • •

In Christmas of 2009, I found myself in a pew of All Saints' Episcopal Church in Beverly Hills, listening to an offertory piece sung by the choir. It was the transition point in the Holy Eucharist, from liturgy of the Word to liturgy of the Table. We the people were gathering our alms, set against the backdrop of the setting of the altar for the Great Thanksgiving. The choral piece that day was timed for "John the Baptist" Sunday, which in actuality could be said to be two Sundays back-to-back in the season of Advent. It was "This is the Record of John" by Orlando Gibbons (1583–1625), an amazing call-and-response motet where the Jewish leaders implore John the Baptist to answer questions about his identity. John does not resist, but he recalibrates their orientation, suggesting that he is not a prophet, and not the Messiah, but merely the one who is preparing the way.

> And they said, "Art thou Elias? Art thou Elias?"
> And he said, "I am not."
> And he said plainly, "I am not the Christ."[11]

A switch flipped in me. It was unmistakably an echo of the switch that flipped in the waters off the shore of Marathon Key, Florida. I moved from shadow to light. As the choir sang the questions and the alto soloist clarified her

answers to bring the identity of the protagonist into the fore, I was awakened. And it was exactly like the awakening of my awareness of my sexuality twelve years earlier.

I am not doing what I am supposed to be doing.

Okay, great. Countless millennials and people in midlife crises have had the same thought. What's the big deal? So change your job. Move to a new apartment, or a new city. Start a new endeavor.

No. This was not only bigger, but it was deeper in the soul. This was God speaking, if we can call it that. It was in the pit of my being, a sense that I was not doing what God wanted me to do.

I am not.

Some time after that brief stirring moment in the pews of All Saints' Church, I went home to Virginia for Christmas vacation. I was frustrated, I suppose. I spent the entire break confused and troubled. The reason was this: I had been down this road before. When I was fifteen, I went on my first mission trip with my Episcopal Church youth group to a very poor part of eastern Tennessee. On that trip, the twenty or so teenagers from a privileged section of Richmond suburbia lent their little hands to a Habitat for Humanity–style project. We built a bathroom onto the house of a ninety-five-year-old woman who had been too poor to have anything but an outhouse. She had gangrene and a missing leg. Her simple home reeked of old urine and mildew. And yet, she glowed with an inner spirit that was unmistakably holy. For in this rat pack of teens, she saw the hope that is founded on the light of the world. Because for her, her final years were about to be just a little bit better because of these kids. For her, the name of Jesus Christ had united these boys and girls and plucked them out of their privilege and into her dirty impoverished home to do some good work for a change. When we returned to Richmond, coming to worship to talk about our experience on

the mission trip, I was overcome with emotion. What had just happened to me?

I was hooked on God from that point on. I knew from the second we drove our church van away from Jefferson City, Tennessee, at the end of that momentous trip, that I was in God's hands. I did not know how or when or by what means, but I knew from that point onward, I would be in the orbit of the Church. Soon there were other opportunities in my Richmond faith community to be involved, and the fellowship of those friends and that community stoked the fire of a kind of calling at this young age. By the time I was graduating from high school, the thought was crystallizing: what if I became a priest?

The priesthood seemed like a good gig. You work on Sundays, but how hard could the rest of the job be? Come to the office and read some books, write a sermon, maybe do some pontificating. Plan a mission trip here and there. Write a newsletter. Seems like fun, right?

The irony is, of course, it is not like that at all. But before we go there, I should point out that wiser heads prevailed in my case. I decided to think about the priesthood at a later time, and went off to college. The sense of call that was first stirred up at age fifteen would return again a few years later. That time, a college chaplain recognized a call happening in me, as I became a leader in our Episcopal Campus Ministry (that'll do it). But this time, for better or for worse, I resisted that calling. Instead, I abandoned what seemed like a sense of God's purpose for me, and went with the gut—which drew me out to Los Angeles to try to work in the film business. This led me to a career in marketing at Fox Searchlight Pictures, a division of 20th Century Fox. For nearly seven years, I was able to focus primarily on this work.

Lurking in the background all through this time, however, was a pull toward some kind of work for God's king-

dom. But what does one do with a call that isn't necessarily convenient? We build blockades. If I can't hear God calling, maybe I can escape the responsibility. This was essentially what I, and many others, did in avoiding my true calling and my true self. Little did I realize, God tends to get God's way.

• • •

In Mark and Matthew's gospels, Simon son of Jonah, one of the twelve disciples, confesses in front of his friends that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matt. 16:16). Jesus famously renames Simon as "Peter," *Cephas* in Aramaic, *Petra* in Greek, which means, literally, "rock." On this rock, Jesus builds his church. This is a little bit of redactic work on the part of the authors to emphasize and underscore Peter's importance in later becoming the head of the church. By the time of the composition of Mark and Matthew (as late as 70 CE and 90 CE, respectively), Peter would have been martyred and dead many years, but his influence on the formation of the early Church that would sprout Christianity would have been felt significantly.

The Confession of Peter, as we now refer to it, marks a moment in the New Testament when Christianity goes public. It ceases to be a following of insiders, and now has vested leadership in place for when Jesus the Christ will be killed, resurrected, and later ascended. Peter will ascend to leadership in early Christianity, keeping Jerusalem as a home base. Paul of Tarsus would ensure the Word is spread amongst the Gentiles in Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, and beyond. But Peter's importance has another dimension; he is, effectively, the first priest, bishop, and, by default, pope.

Part of Peter's legacy is that he was touched, literally and physically touched by Christ. Peter then baptizes and blesses others in Christ's name. He touches them, and

they in turn touch others, and soon a line of succession is started. This is what we know as the Apostolic Succession, a belief that this system of hands laid upon heads in the ordination of clergy to this day stretches back by the determinable line of bishops all the way to Peter—and by transference, Jesus himself. The Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and the Anglican Communion (including the Episcopal Church) all trace their bishops' lineage through the Apostolic Succession. This is an essential mark upon ordained clergy underpinning the theology of the clergy for two millennia.

The Apostolic Succession from St. Peter covers bishops (the *episcopate,* from the Greek word for "overseer") in the Church. Priests, deacons, and the laity make up the rest of the "orders" of the Church. Priests are ordained, and have been for centuries, to be pastoral and liturgical leaders in their communities and churches. The priesthood, or *presbyterate* (from the Greek for "elder"), is a call to administrate, officiate in the place of the bishop, and care for both rich and poor, sick and healthy alike. Deacons, who are members of the *diaconate* (from the Greek root word *diakonos,* which means "to the community") hold a special distinction, called to be on the frontlines of the world beyond the doors of the church sanctuary. The order of the diaconate compels its deacons to bring the church to the world, and then to bring the world's needs to the church. This takes a practical form to this very day, as it has since inception, as a role of holy servitude. Deacons tend to the sick, the poor, the marginalized; they are chaplains, prison ministers, and visitors to the infirmed. They assist in the liturgical and sacramental life of a church or mission, but they are not primarily concerned with the work of leading. They are servants.

The fourth, and arguably most essential, member of the holy orders of the Church is the laity. From the Greek

words *laikos* and *laos*, meaning "people of God," the laity form the overwhelming majority of the faithful. Put simply, without lay members, there is no church. The laity are the people, the heart and soul of each parish. They participate and they lead mostly in voluntary capacities within the church—lead music, sing in choirs, teach, demonstrate good stewardship, assist where needed in liturgy. They count in the millions worldwide. In all of this, the laity discern their own calling in the Church and in the world, just as a prospective priest, deacon, or bishop.

When a person moves like I did after hearing Gibbons's "This is the Record of John" from sensing a call to testing a call (that is, speaking up about one's sense of call and testing its accuracy), the person used to receive a new title: *aspirant*.[12] As one might assume, this term was traditionally used to describe a woman or man who "aspires" not necessarily to the diaconate, presbyterate, or episcopate, but who instead aspires to lean on the community to assess where God is calling him or her. Now we might call this person a *seeker*.

All of this discussion of the nature of holy orders is the backdrop for the policy of the Episcopal Church in raising leaders—and defines how leadership is to be identified. Some key things are addressed right up front in the Canons of the Episcopal Church that should be in the mind of anyone approaching a test of his or her calling. Discernment processes are not to be denied due to any form of discrimination:

> Sec. 2. No person shall be denied access to the discernment process for any ministry, lay or ordained, in this Church because of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disabilities or age, except as otherwise provided by these Canons. No right to licensing, ordination, or election is hereby established.

> Sec. 3. The provisions of these Canons for the admission of Candidates for the Ordination to the three Orders: Bishops, Priests and Deacons shall be equally applicable to men and women.[13]

Putting the polity aside for the moment, it is important for the discerner to realize a few remarkable things about the process for ministry in the Episcopal Church. Before a person even speaks up about their sense of a calling, a system has been laid in place that protects the person and the people of God. In a "postcrisis" era of the Church,[14] the need to have a stringent and thorough process in place for the selection of clergy is absolutely critical. This has put a strain on LGBT+ discerners, understandably, in a world that has generally feared the "other" and misunderstood sexuality of its people—and its clergy. Nevertheless, the Episcopal Church has a system in place that weeds out, at worst, psychologically or emotionally troubled seekers to ministry. At best, it is a system that rigorously examines and challenges the queer nominee to conform to the norms of a 240-year-old institution, as well as take seriously the need to be introspective and honest. This sets the stage, then, for the person's transition from one who senses a call to one who *tests* the call in the discernment process.

Notes

1. "Homosexuality 101" by Julie Harren, from *Facts About Youth,* a project of the American College of Pediatricians. factsaboutyouth.com.

2. Alan Downs, *The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2005), 10.

3. Ibid., 10–11 (emphasis in the original).

4. Chris Glaser, *Uncommon Calling: A Gay Man's Struggle to Serve the Church* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 3.

5. For more on the media's neglect to cover this issue (including case studies where the victims' gender was obfuscated intentionally), read the fascinating 2018 GLAAD report "More Than a Number" at http://www.glaad.org/sites/default/files/MTAN/More%20Than%20A%20Number%20-%20GLAAD.pdf.

6. Downs, *Velvet Rage,* x.

7. The close observer of a young me in the 1990s would have noted that I had an affinity for Broadway show tunes, I had never dated a single girl in middle or high school, and, most telling, that I habitually videotaped the television soap opera *All My Children* and watched it every afternoon.

8. Suzanne G. Farnham, Joseph P. Gill, R. Taylor McLean, and Susan M. Ward, *Listening Hearts: Discerning Call in Community* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1991), 2.

9. As opposed to "God has a plan all drawn up and I have to figure it out somehow."

10. Farnham et al., *Listening Hearts,* 2.

11. Orlando Gibbons,"This is the Record of John," 1600s, England.

12. The Canons of the Episcopal Church were amended in 2015 to focus less on self-nomination to the discernment process and more toward an understanding of call as discerned from the community. This has led to the abandonment of the once-familiar term "aspirant." However, it was so common to hear the term "aspirant" used fairly recently, as in my process and many colleagues' discernments as well, that it is easy to slip back into that terminology. In speaking in the present tense, I will instead refer to persons at this stage of the discernment process as "nominees."

13. The Archives of the Episcopal Church, *Constitution and Canons 2015,* Adopted and Revised in General Convention, 1789–2015, Title III: Ministry, Canon 1, p. 67, https://www.episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/2015_candc.pdf.

14. This is my term for an era going back about fifty years now, chronicling the rise of sexual abuse cases against clergy (most notably and notoriously at the hands of Roman Catholic priests, as depicted in the 2016 Best Picture winner, *Spotlight*). Note that I mean rise of *cases*, not of sexual abuse, which I am afraid has been going on for millennia so long as there are the clinically ill in positions of power over others.