

Dear Ascension Episcopal Church,

With much gladness and gratitude of heart, I am honored and humbled to serve as your next Rector. While I look forward to meeting all of you and to our ministry together serving Christ at Ascension Episcopal Church, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and give you a little personal and ministerial background.

My family is my inspiration. I am happily married to my beautiful wife of 24 years, Joni. You will soon come to realize, once you get to know her, that I married way above my pay-grade. Joni is a passionate Middle School teacher and looks forward to continuing her career in Houston. She is a fantastic person, mother, teacher, friend, and wife. From our union, we have four creative and vibrant children. Henry, 23, a senior at the University of Colorado who will be moving to Cambodia in July to teach English, Charles, 19, a freshman at Savannah College of Arts and Design studying Sound Design, Grayson, 17, a senior in High School, and Cooper, 14, a freshman in High School. Rounding out our family are our two spoiled dogs and one laidback cat,

I am 52 years old and grew up in the small town of Bastrop in Northeast Louisiana. Upon graduating with a degree in Finance and Economics from the University of Louisiana, Monroe in 1990, I moved to Mobile, Alabama where I worked in management for a Southeast regional industrial construction company. During my time in industrial construction, I also earned an MBA from the University of South Alabama.

In 1997, after much discernment and as a member of All Saints Episcopal Church in Mobile, I became a postulant from the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. I, along with my wife and one-year-old son, left for seminary at the University of the South, Sewanee, Tennessee. I graduated with a Master of Divinity from Sewanee in May of 2000 and was ordained Deacon and Priest by the Right Reverend Charles F. Duvall.

Starting June 2000, I began my ordained ministry as the curate at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Mobile. I served St. Luke's for a year and a half before receiving a call in January 2002 to be the rector of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in New Iberia, Louisiana. Similarly to Ascension, Epiphany had a day school through 5th Grade with over 200 students. The school was a thriving and integral part of our ministry to the community. Being the only Episcopal church in a city filled with Roman Catholic churches and located in the heart of Cajun country, Epiphany was a unique ministry field. The food was great, and the people were colorful.

After seven and a half years of wonderful ministry at Epiphany, I felt drawn back to South Alabama. My mother was seriously ill and had no other family to care for her. Both Joni and I wanted to give our children the opportunity to develop relationships with their grandmother who had always lived states away. Two years after our move back to the Alabama coast, sadly, my mother passed away. It was an invaluable time, and we were so grateful that our family was able to be with her in her final months.

Starting in 2009, I served for a short time as an assistant to the rector at St. Paul's, Daphne, Alabama before being named as the Priest in Charge at Trinity, Atmore and Immanuel, Bay Minette. Trinity and Immanuel were both rural parishes with small but vibrant congregations. It was an invaluable

experience serving two parishes at the same time each with their unique mission and needs. In 2014, I was called as Vicar of the Episcopal Church of the Advent, in Lillian, located on the Alabama-Florida border near Pensacola. Over the past 4+ years, I have been privileged to serve Christ with the faithful folks of Advent Church on the Alabama Gulf Coast.

I am incredibly excited about our future together and am earnestly impressed with what God has accomplished through you, as the Body of Christ, in West Houston. I am humbled and honored that you called me to be a part of your life together, and I am looking forward to many fruitful and faith-filled years serving Christ with you.

Please know that I am praying for all of you daily. *"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way; bearing fruit in every work and growing in the knowledge of God."* – Colossians 1:9-10

May the God of hope and peace bless you today and always. I look forward to meeting you all very soon!

Yours in Christ,

Mark McDonald+