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Mr. Tom Mauro, Chair  
Holy Cross Episcopal Church  
6066 Corde del Cedro  
Carlsbad, CA 92011

28 December, 2009

Dear Mr. Mauro and Members of the Calling Committee,

*I write to express interest in the position of Vicar of Holy Cross, Carlsbad. I am currently finishing a Doctor of Ministry program at Church Divinity School of the Pacific (CDSF) in Berkeley, California, and hope to begin work after May, 2010. I am canonically resident in Northwest Texas, where I served as rector of St. John's, Odessa, from 1996-2008. Following is a description of my calling, as well as three highlights from my life and ministry.*

*My calling, as I grow to discern it, is to aid healing and wholeness in rebuilding congregations, particularly those that have experienced conflict and its debilitating effects. I have drawn on three convictions in carrying out this calling thus far: 1) that the church is fundamentally catholic, and therefore, inclusive; 2) that priestly ministry is essentially pastoral in all aspects; 3) that communal practice of Anglican worship mark the focal point for congregational life and ministry.*

*St. John's Episcopal Church in Odessa, Texas, experienced near-death in the early 1990s due to a series of conflicts, both with their rector, and between church factions. Owing to serious self-reflection and effective interim ministry, a faithful remnant pooled their resources together to call a new rector. Despite significant challenges, not the least of which was a meager budget, we worked strategically to re-establish ministries of worship and outreach, education and pastoral care. Over the course of twelve years, the congregation retired its debts, completed two significant building projects to benefit the church and its affiliated dayschool, and grew from an average Sunday attendance of 35 to 87. Throughout this process, the congregation's identity, rooted in a marvelous history, maintained consistency with its past while growing to embrace an even wider reach to the community.*

*It is not only because I have experienced success in one congregation's rebuilding that I feel passion for this kind of ministry. My own understanding of priesthood, and of the Church's mission of reconciliation, has been positively transformed through the practice of congregational ministry. In the community of the baptized, the relationship between members is essentially a personal one, predicated on trust. A priest and fellow clergy come to know*

members of a congregation, and ministry is shaped by this mutual care. In daily Christian practice, all members know themselves to be no collection of scattered individuals, but a people who grow together in experience of God's grace. At a time when unity is under serious threat in our church, nation and world, Episcopal congregations have a unique opportunity to model community. I welcome the challenges that the Church today holds for exercising leadership that supports healthy and whole congregations.

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*Highlight #1. My ordained ministry began in June, 1993, at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Des Moines, Iowa. There, I worked with clergy and lay leaders, and assumed primary responsibility for directing Youth and Outreach Ministries. One month after I began, the Dean took an extensive trip abroad, leaving me in charge of day-to-day administration. A couple of weeks into this time, a flood devastated Des Moines and the surrounding region. Because the water treatment facility was located at the confluence of two rivers, the city water supply was threatened for two weeks. St. Paul's is located on high ground (literally on High Street), so we had a unique opportunity to emerge as an outreach center to downtown Des Moines. In the Dean's absence, it fell to me to organize this work. I was amazed at what seemed like parishioners' limitless capacities to help, though many of them were suffering the flood's consequences in their homes or businesses. Their existing networks facilitated quick, effective and creative solutions to acute problems. When a downtown retirement facility could not provide meals to its resident, St. Paul's joined with other downtown congregations to prepare three meals daily, for two weeks. Additionally, we held worship services to support downtown workers, and provided daytime respite for emergency workers. After the flood subsided, St. Paul's, among numerous other agencies, coordinated with FEMA to partner with flood victims in their rebuilding efforts. In this phase, we partnered with those in need, actually rebuilding in some cases, and in developing viable links to community resources, in others. Most importantly, we offered spiritual support that social service agencies, in the face of overwhelming demands, could not provide. This experience taught me how natural disasters can devastate communities, but also how they can inspire congregations in their self-understanding, and transform their service to a world in need.*

*Highlight #2. During my tenure as rector of St. John's, Odessa, Texas, I played a role in its onsite dayschool. St. John's Episcopal School, in existence for 50 years at this point, had a fulltime administrator and a staff of 27 full and part-time employees. Its enrollment was 230 students, preK through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. There had been historic ties between St. John's Church and School, but because the communities had very little overlap after the congregation's decline, I wanted to help bridge the two communities in order to enhance*

mutual partnership in key areas. This growing partnership inspired leaders of both the Church and School to meet together quarterly, to do long-range planning. Together, through three-year pledge campaigns, we pursued building renovation and expansion, desperately needed for both communities to live well into the future. By 2008, two building projects totaling \$2 million had been completed, and all but 20% of the debt had been retired.

Additionally, I took my role as dayschool chaplain seriously. Three mornings weekly, I officiated at chapel services. We called the church God's House, and our worship was a modified version of Morning Prayer. Each morning, we sang about God's welcome, from every cultural and faith tradition that was represented in the school. The students assumed age-appropriate roles, reading scripture, praying collects and dramatizing stories. I'll never forget the time when the child of a prominent Baptist family led his mother into church and said, "I'm so happy you can come to my church today, mom." Daily Anglican worship grounded us as a community - Baptists, Hindus, Catholics, men, women and children, Latinos, Anglos and African-Americans. And along with other Holy Day observances of Ash Wednesday, Easter, Christmas, this collective worship offered a larger context in which to see ourselves as one family: strong in our diversity, and in our unity.

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*This experience offered me new insight into the fruits of collaborative work. It also taught me a great deal about nurturing children, and about their value in the life of a community.*

*Highlight #3. In the culturally conservative Diocese of Northwest Texas, the weeks and months following the 2003 General Convention proved to be an immense challenge. Like many congregations in our diocese, St. John's had the makings of a divided congregation. Not only did the media cast the Episcopal Church negatively, but no diocesan congregations modeled anything approaching the creative use of conflict. I cannot overstate how unstable our congregation felt in light of the presence of those supporting gay marriage and ordination, and members opposed to the same. Oversimplified discussions of Bishop-elect Robinson further polarized our community. Adding to the complexity were the mixed responses that the Vestry and I voiced to the congregation about the presenting issues. In other words, we *had* no like-minded position to urge, at least not about human sexuality. In face of this ambiguity, six families and/or individuals left St. John's, and our budget sustained significant loss.*

*In the wake of these losses, that the core community continued its practice of worship and ministry, felt like no small achievement. Even amidst budgetary constraints, all of us agreed that no outreach program should suffer. And no outreach program did suffer. Also, we were given to recall previous risk-taking experiences from St. John's history, such as when, in the late 1960s, they became first in the community to invite African Americans to join,*

*or when, in 1996, they were the first diocesan congregation to call a female rector. These, and other experiences that had previously enlarged the congregation's self-understanding, also informed our challenges. As rector, I felt it was incumbent upon me to spend much time listening to conservative members. I visited in homes. I sought out their challenges. I did everything that I could to honor their integrity, and mine. Our Vestry worked hard to ensure a range of perspectives on the timely issues, and as we grew more diverse, our leadership became stronger. Somewhere in this painful and chaotic time, by God's grace, the same differences that could have divided us took on more power to unite us.*

*I wouldn't have dreamed in 2003 that I could someday speak of this experience as a highlight. But by 2008, St. John's was stronger for having retained many of its conservative members while also making room for more liberal ones. As we grew in our outreach to the community and to each other, we ceased to be those who took 'this' or 'that' position on the issues, and remembered that we were fellow members who worshiped and served side by side. Living through this pain, particularly, taught me that tensions are always present in a community of faith. They may emerge in times of greater conflict, but they are always present. We do well to value these differences in congregations, and to incorporate them into our life and leadership, because they are quite often the stuff from which stronger, more effective, ministry emerges.*

*I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts with you, and wish you all God's blessings in your search.*

*with thanksgiving,  
Laura Deaderick*