

Essay Responses 1-5

The Very Reverend Marcus George Halley, DMin

Prompt 1

• A wise priest once said, “The best thing you can ever do for your ministry is have a life outside the Church.” Tell us about your support network and what is especially life-giving in your life outside the Church. What does your daily prayer life look like? What sustains you in your relationship with God?

In one of my favorite poems by Nikki Giovanni, “Nikki-Rosa,” she describes her childhood as being “quite happy” because, despite the personal and systemic challenges she faced, she remembers the loving and supportive — if imperfect — family network that surrounded her. I am blessed to share the same testimony. I am grateful for the love which has surrounded me throughout my life, from parents, grandparents, siblings, and a host of extended family from New Jersey to Georgia and beyond. I would be remiss if I didn’t mention my beloved husband (also an Episcopal priest), whose love and support have been both stalwart buffers against the inevitable challenges and disappointments of ministry and a partner with whom to share its joys and successes. He and I share the support of our families of origin living across the country in North Carolina and Arizona. Our life together also includes a network of friends — within and beyond the Church — with whom we regularly gather for board games, movies, or for the dinner parties I love to host. I am also glad to be a part of a colleague group comprised of eight clergy friends who gather annually to reflect on our lives in ministry and beyond. I am grateful for other friends and mentors in and beyond the church to whom I can go for advice or just a listening ear.

Another invaluable source of support is my life in Jesus Christ. The mainstays of my devotional life are regular participation in the eucharistic feast and observing the Daily Office. I incorporate other prayer practices including the Examen, lectio divina, or centering prayer depending on my spiritual hunger in any given moment. I have also loved exploring other, perhaps less-formal forms of prayer such as running, gardening, or beekeeping, all of which remind me that I am a beloved part of God’s wider creation.

Overall, God’s generous grace sustains me in my relationship with God. The relationship would wither on the vine were it left to me alone. The final verse of “Come thou fount of every blessing,” one of my favorite hymns, says it best: “O to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be. Let thy goodness like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee...” Looking back over my life, I can clearly identify the times when God’s grace came to me in a challenging moment through the loving support of family and friends, the helpful advice of a mentor, or an experience of what St. Paul calls the “peace that passes all understanding.” These experiences serve as reminders that God is not an impersonal concept, but a personal reality whose love took on flesh to be with us and to raise us to new and unending life in God.

Essay Responses 1-5

The Very Reverend Marcus George Halley, DMin

Prompt 2

• In the bishop's ordination vows the candidate is asked: "Will you boldly proclaim and interpret the Gospel of Christ, enlightening the minds and stirring up the conscience of your people?" How do you interpret the Gospel? How are you living out this charge in your current life and ministry?

While leading *Jesus and the Disinherited* as a book study group with students this past Lent, a student pointed out examples of Christian Nationalists using scripture to support their worldview and then asked me how I knew my interpretation of scripture was "right." I first shared with her a line from Thomas Merton's famous prayer — "I believe the desire to please you does in fact please you" — and reminded her that God's grace covers us when we fail. I then shared the interpretive lens that helps keep me on what I believe to be the right track. 1 John 4:8 tells us "God is love." John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Finally, when challenged to name the "greatest commandment," Jesus says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39).'" Taken together, the message is clear: God has given us a profound love, and our response to this love — accepting or rejecting it — makes the difference. Howard Thurman frames our acceptance of love as an active reassertion of freedom and dignity in the face of dehumanization. Every other conviction and commitment I try to follow in my life seeks to work out what love looks like in any given moment or situation. What difference does love make to cascading global injustices and ascendent extremism? Spiritual disconnection and malaise? Personal and civic anxiety? Hunger and poverty? Loneliness and isolation? In short: *love makes all the difference.*

Love calls us to choose community and connection over isolation and division. Perhaps this has never been truer in our lifetimes than in our current fraught political moment. Regardless of one's partisan or ideological leanings or the ordering of one's values, the primary Christian virtue is the patient, kind, and forbearing love we read about in 1 Corinthians 13. This commitment was crucial when I worked with faculty, staff, and students to create spaces for understanding and dialogue in the wake of two recent polarizing events: the terrorism and humanitarian crisis in the Holy Land as well as the recent presidential election season. Whether preaching in Chapel or speaking at campus-wide celebrations, counseling colleagues or students experiencing pain or anxiety, or working with a group of multi-faith student leaders to organize small groups where other students could learn from one another's experiences and stories, I reminded individuals and communities that we have an option (and among Christians, an *obligation*) to love others by leaning into patience, empathy, and curiosity. This posture allows us to experience the possibility of existing beyond the dehumanizing limitations of enemies or adversaries and to become for one another what we are to God: friends.

Essay Responses 1-5

The Very Reverend Marcus George Halley, DMin

Prompt 3

• **Our pastoral need is to have a strong and prophetic leader who will strategically equip and mobilize us for mission and ministry. Describe a time that you equipped and mobilized people for a particular ministry.**

A prophet is one whose holy imagination challenges us to reconsider the limits of the possible and stirs the hearts of the community to the greater works of faith, hope, and love that bring God's future into the present. Often, the biggest obstacles working against the future we feel called towards are the once helpful system and practices that now fail to serve the mission but themselves have *become* the mission.

When I arrived as the rector of Saint Paul's Church on Lake of the Isles in Minneapolis immediately after the 2016 presidential election, I found a community in deep pain. They were also struggling with a stubborn structural deficit. All told, the parish felt stuck. Fear and anxiety led them to substitute survival with mission. My task was to remind them of God's faithfulness. Whenever a sense of scarcity began to limit what we thought was possible, I would remind them "God will always provide what we need, to do what God asks us to do." Through prayerful discernment we discovered that the parish wanted to strengthen ministries that address hunger and homelessness in Minneapolis. The ministry they aspired to was out in the community. We needed to realign the institution to support the people in their work.

The first change I instituted was working with the vestry to organize Commission Saturdays, quarterly gatherings of parish leadership that included business sessions, plenary formation opportunities, and community-building exercises. The idea was simple: we're going to lean into the abundance of wisdom within our community and learn from one another. The second change I instituted involved restructuring and refocusing vestry meetings. Instead of beginning with the problem, we opened meetings with Bible study, shifting our focus to the story in which God invites us to participate. Before long, commissions that had become defunct or dysfunctional were beginning to bear new fruit, including a deeper partnership with an organization that challenged structural homelessness in the Twin Cities. Additionally, not only was the Vestry able to support a new leadership model that alleviated the structural deficit within one year, but new ministries were born, including one that raised thousands of dollars to give micro-grants to local social service organizations.

The work of reimagining the systems of St. Paul's prophetically challenged the assumptions that prevented the church from stepping into a new future. The journey was prayerful, iterative, and reflective. The parish learned that there was enough wisdom and experience in the room to tackle the biggest challenges. I learned that the task of a prophetic leader is to help a community cultivate the theological imagination to develop a vision compelling enough to elicit the community's collective transformation.

Essay Responses 1-5

The Very Reverend Marcus George Halley, DMin

Prompt 4

- In your current ministry context, how are you collaborating with others to foster multicultural or multilingual ministry?

Nurturing a vibrant multicultural or multilingual ministry requires curiosity and humility. Providing leadership to a struggling and under-resourced Muslim Life program was one of the first challenges I faced when I became Trinity's chaplain and dean of Spiritual and Religious Life. By remaining curious, I was able to organize Iftars (during Ramadan) and other experiences while building the capacity of the overall program to support a full-time director. I did so by asking questions and giving Muslim students, many of whom come from Arab or Southeast Asian countries, the opportunity to teach me what type of support they needed, enabling me to leverage the resources of the college to meet them where they were.

These skills came in handy again this past year. The departure of our campus rabbi during the summer left me with the task of providing interim pastoral and programmatic support for our Hillel (Jewish Life) program while we conducted a search for our new director. This work was considerably more difficult in the wake of the horrifying events in the Holy Land. The reactions to these global events in our community led to many Jewish students to feel misunderstood by administrators, faculty, and their peers at a time when antisemitism was ascendant. Curiosity and humility enabled me to enter vulnerable spaces with Jewish students, to hear their concerns, and offer appropriate support.

Additionally, I am incredibly proud of the Trinity College Chapel Interfaith Fellowship program, an initiative I started when I first arrived, whose purpose is to gather a multi-faith community of learners and organizers committed to positive change through genuine relationships, thoughtful action, and intentional curiosity. This group is made up of 15 students representing 7 countries and multiple faith traditions including Reformed and Roman Catholic Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Afro-Caribbean spirituality, and Agnosticism. We practice active listening and curiosity and build collaborative interfaith programs that invite the larger community to share our learning.

Effective ministry across any sort of difference—cultural or linguistic—begins with humility. Those in positions of power must be humble enough to decenter our perspectives, find common ground, and learn from and value the experiences of others. Moreover, we must also be willing to incorporate our learning into a larger framework and empower existing and emerging leaders to co-create experiences of genuine welcome and belonging that inform, and thus transform, the whole system.

Essay Responses 1-5

The Very Reverend Marcus George Halley, DMin

Prompt 5

• Tell us why you feel persuaded to serve as Bishop of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts during this time and season in our life together.

Inspiring communities of disciples towards their own Gospel-shaped transformation through collaborative organizational leadership, preaching and teaching, celebrating the sacraments, and pastoral care, in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world is work that brings me great joy. Such leadership has supported me as a disciple and as a priest, and I know the difference inspired people make in their communities. Howard Thurman once told someone lamenting the state of the world, “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

As I have come to know your diocese through your profile and the relationships we’ve formed and conversations we’ve shared, I am persuaded that God calls us to this moment. Your expressed pastoral need for a “strong and prophetic leader who will strategically equip and mobilize us for mission and ministry” resonates with me. We find ourselves in a mutual and holy space of helping one another ask new, deeper, and more creative questions. God calls us to dream bigger, more courageous dreams. God calls the Church to a renewed missionary zeal. Perhaps God calls us to be more together.

Writing in 1776 during a similar time of low civic morale, social upheaval, and transformation, Thomas Paine said, “These are the times that try men’s souls.” We see distortions of the Gospel in the public square. Our volatile world yearns for good news and a more compassionate way to be human. The joyful witness of a community of Christian disciples, grounded in the sure foundation of Jesus Christ, and committed to walking his way of love, can meet the world’s spiritual, emotional, and material hunger with courage and hope. In the words of Verna Dozier, we must ask, “What would it look like to actually follow Jesus?” It looks like taking up our cross in this mission moment by cultivating and reviving communities centered on self-giving love and courageous compassion, fed and sustained by grace, where we dare to build bigger tables to share God’s rich abundance.

I see a desire for revival in the words of your profile and within the rich conversations we have shared. As our church navigates fierce headwinds, and as the tectonic plates of religious and civic life shift beneath our feet, our God remains faithful. The changes we experience happen not to us, but for us. Like the Israelites journeying through the desert, our revival and transformation occur on the way through this wilderness toward the world God prepares for all of us. If called as your next bishop, I look forward to our journey together.