

## Essay Responses 1-5

The Very Rev. Miguelina Howell

### 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?

While I give my whole self to God’s work in our beloved Church, I know I am most faithful — and most effective — when I’m living a full, balanced, and rooted life beyond the Church’s walls.

My family is my core support network. My husband, an entrepreneur with a creative and visionary spirit, is my daily encourager and accountability partner. Our marriage is a partnership built on deep mutual respect and shared faith. Our three boys bring joy, movement, and a holy kind of chaos to our home — they keep me grounded in the present and remind me daily of the sacredness of ordinary life.

My parents are also essential members of my support system, along with a beautiful group of friends I consider chosen family. They come from a wide range of faith traditions, denominations, ethnicities, and socioeconomic backgrounds — a true mosaic that reflects God’s beloved community and enriches my life beyond measure.

Since attending CREDO in 2010, I’ve intentionally embraced a rule of life that includes nurturing friendships outside of church circles. This practice has broadened my horizons and created countless opportunities to explore who I am beyond the strong identity I hold as a Christian and ordained minister.

Spending time with my family and chosen family is deeply life-giving. Sitting on the back porch with a novel or watching my kids play brings real joy to my heart. I treasure time with friends who know me as Miguelina, “Migue,” or “Lina” — not just as a priest or leader — people who pray with and for me, speak the truth in love, and know me well enough to never eat a banana in my presence (I have a strong aversion to them!).

Each day, my devotional life is grounded in a prayer from *Forward Movement’s Day by Day* — “A Morning Resolve” — a holistic prayer that calls me to nurture childlike faith, cultivate cheerfulness, practice fidelity in every trust, and embrace diligence in appointed service. In that spirit, I understand every faithful action and conversation with God and God’s people as an act of prayer.

My life follows a rhythm of prayer that flows with the seasons of ministry and motherhood — not always tidy or scheduled, but always real.

What sustains me in my relationship with God is the knowledge that I am beloved, and that God has called and set me apart to serve. God’s unconditional love is made palpable in countless ways — through people, through circumstances, through grace that words cannot fully explain but the heart and Spirit know to be true. It sustains me to be reminded, again and again, that when God calls, God equips.

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### 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?

The message of the Gospel is clear: **God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life** (John 3:16). God came in the person of Jesus Christ to reconcile us to Godself and to one another. That love is then channeled through us into the world as a **ministry of reconciliation** — a Christian mission rooted in healing, forgiveness, and restoring right relationship with God and with one another (2 Corinthians 5:18–20).

In my current ministry, together with God's people at Christ Church Cathedral, I live out the charge to boldly proclaim and interpret the Gospel of Christ, **enlightening minds and stirring consciences**, in many ways, including but not limited to:

- Bold preaching on matters of spirituality, never shying away from the Church's prophetic witness in times of injustice or political complicity.
- Offering pastoral presence during national and local tragedies.
- Fostering partnerships with non-religious groups seeking the welfare of our beloved city.
- Grounding conversations about faith in the public square — through formation series, dialogue with community partners, and intentional reflection on our role as followers of Jesus in our immediate context.
- Strengthening our feeding programs and all efforts that support those on the margins, including regular food donations to students at our local community college across the street, and sustaining our robust meal ministry and **Church without Walls** community, *Church by the Pond*.

Christ Church Cathedral is a brave, inclusive, and affirming community, deeply convicted of its role as ambassadors of God's love. As their Dean, my call is not to serve as **chaplain of the empire**, but as **prophet to the nation** — a role I am able to embody fully and courageously serving alongside a community clearly committed to equity and justice.

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### 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.**

Upon my arrival at Christ Church Cathedral as Vicar in 2013, the Cathedral was still navigating the challenges of an internal fracture in the system — a wound that required time and deep pastoral care from many to heal and recover. Building trust and equipping the saints to embrace their roles and sense of belonging became essential, as lay leaders grew more committed to living out their baptismal covenant within our community.

Through training sessions, home gatherings, and ongoing pastoral, social, and intentional activities, I led a process of renewal and restructuring at the congregational, administrative, and personnel level. Ministry Teams were formed to respond to the needs of our evolving context. These teams include **Engaging the Arts** and **Christian Formation**, the latter of which extends beyond our walls in partnership with the local community college to offer lectures and programs focused on social and racial justice.

One ministry I am especially proud of is the creation of a street choir — *Music Moves Hartford* — the first of its kind in the Northeast. I partnered with the Executive Director of a nonprofit music organization dedicated to driving social change through music. Together, we created a space where guests of our soup kitchen, many of whom are unhoused or food insecure, could come together to make music. I played a central role in raising funds, recruiting volunteers, and creating an environment of welcome and belonging where choir members feel seen and valued. Today, they perform across the city and gather each Wednesday — now under the leadership of our Cathedral Director of Music — at the headquarters of a local nonprofit to sing and continue building beloved community.

As part of our Cathedral's redevelopment process, I initiated a series of conversations with community partners to explore collaboration and foster connection across sectors. Working in partnership with the directors of our local theater, we launched what is now known as **Conversations in the Public Square** — a regular gathering of leaders from economic, educational, civic, and other sectors who are invested in the wellbeing of the city of Hartford.

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### Prompt 4

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

Christ Church Cathedral is a multicultural, multilingual, and diverse community. In 2013, a local Hispanic congregation closed its doors and became incorporated into the life of Christ Church Cathedral. I am delighted to share that this community has been integrated in healthy and marvelous ways. Much of this success is due to the racial reconciliation work carried out by the Cathedral's Anglo community in the 1990s, as well as the hospitable and warm nature of our Latino members.

Over the past 12 years, we have worked diligently to strengthen our bonds and deepen our engagement with our neighbors by celebrating and embodying the richness of our multicultural and multilingual identity. This has taken many forms — from hosting *Las Posadas* at Hartford Stage (our local Theater), to partnering with local attorneys to offer immigration guidance, to celebrating Latino Heritage Month by sharing featured meals from the various countries represented in our community. We also offer bilingual services, bilingual spiritual retreats, and many other expressions of inclusion and shared faith.

I collaborate closely with our Canon for Latino Ministries, our lay leaders, and local partners to nurture and expand our multicultural and multilingual ministry at Christ Church Cathedral.

In addition, I serve as a mentor to many clergy engaged in Latino/Hispanic Ministries across the wider Church. For over a decade, I was a member of the Council of Advice for the Episcopal Church's Latino/Hispanic Missioner. That experience offered me a broad and deep perspective on strategies, best practices, and the many layers of complexity involved in multicultural and multilingual ministry.

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### 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.**

As I noted in my letter of introduction, over the years I have been encouraged to consider the episcopate by a variety of constituencies — in six different search processes. Each time, I declined without even exploring the possibility. I held a steady conviction that the episcopate was not my call.

But this moment is different.

God's nudge now feels unmistakable — not general, but particular to you. I believe the episcopate is a geographical call, one rooted in the people, the place, ministry needs, and the faithful witness of a specific diocese. I would not consider this call anywhere else. I am standing here only because of who you are and how you live the Gospel in such a time as this.

Your diocese is known for the collegiality among its clergy and bishop, and for its deep commitment to social justice. You are grounded in God's love and have clearly articulated a need — and an openness — to strategize for mission. My God-given gifts in organizational development and pastoral care, along with my deep commitment to mutual ministry and social justice, make this search not only compelling but also a profound opportunity to model that it is possible to be faithful, nimble, and effective at the institutional level while staying true to the spirit of the early Church.

The Diocese of Western Massachusetts is fertile ground for God's mission, given your distinctive geographical connection to colleges and universities, as well as your deep commitment to multicultural ministries. There is ample opportunity to strategize and carry out robust ministry among God's people — including those who consider themselves seekers. This reality, along with your dedication to social and racial justice, inspires me to discern joining you in this holy work.

I am strongly persuaded to explore with you the possibility of God's call to a mutual ministry in the episcopate. After many years of declining invitations, God has now planted a seed of curiosity and openness in my heart — an unmistakable movement of the Holy Spirit — inviting me to discern this call with you. I am terrified, surprised, and open to wherever the Spirit may lead in this process.

Furthermore, I am persuaded that if it is the will of God and God's people that I become your Bishop, I will serve with all that I am and all that I have. Together, we will chart pathways for strategic growth and the building of Beloved Community.